IN THE LAND OF LALLA ROOKH

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In the Land of Lalla Rookh

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Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia

Gulshan BOOKS
Residency Road, Srinagar 190001 Kashmir

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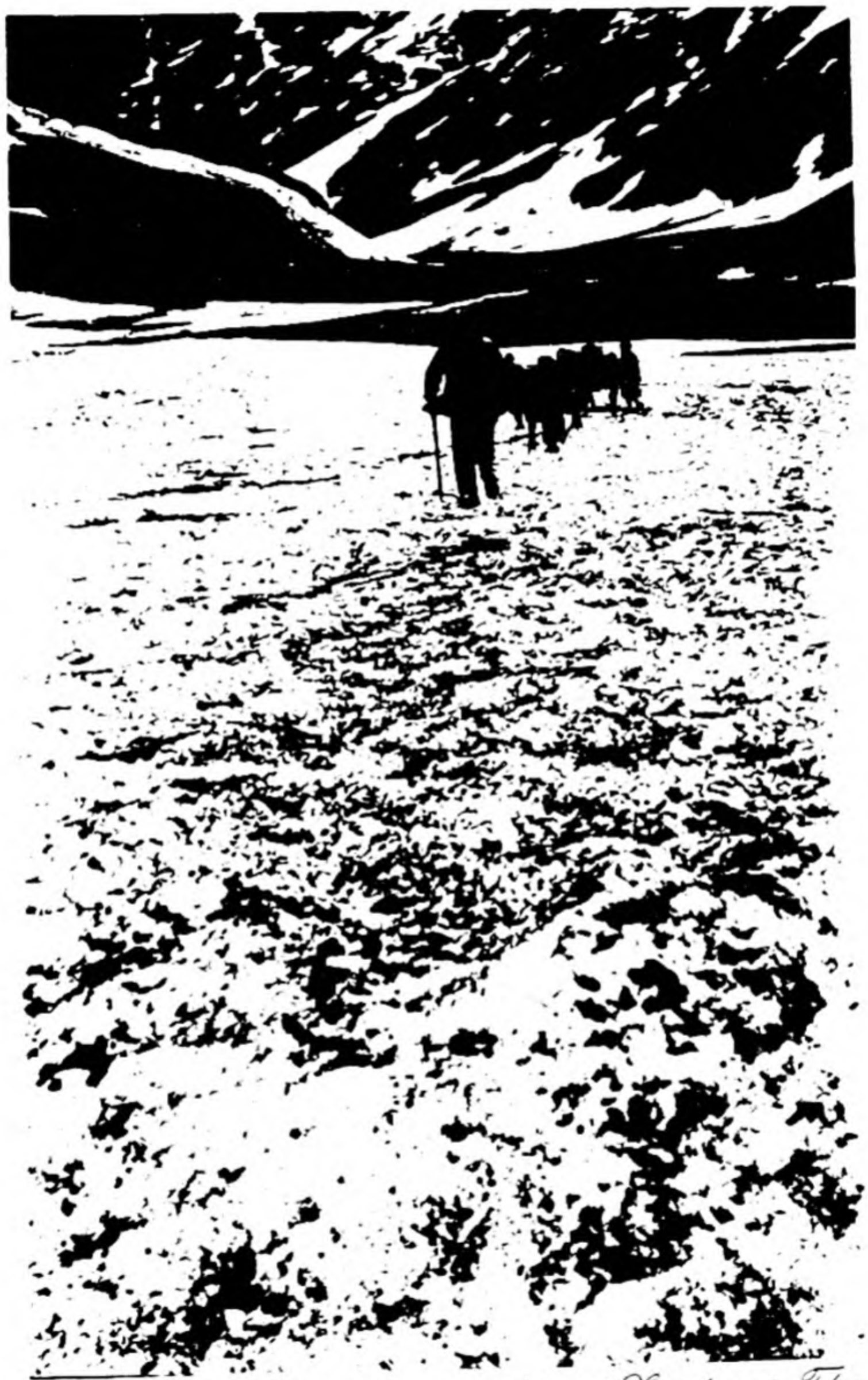


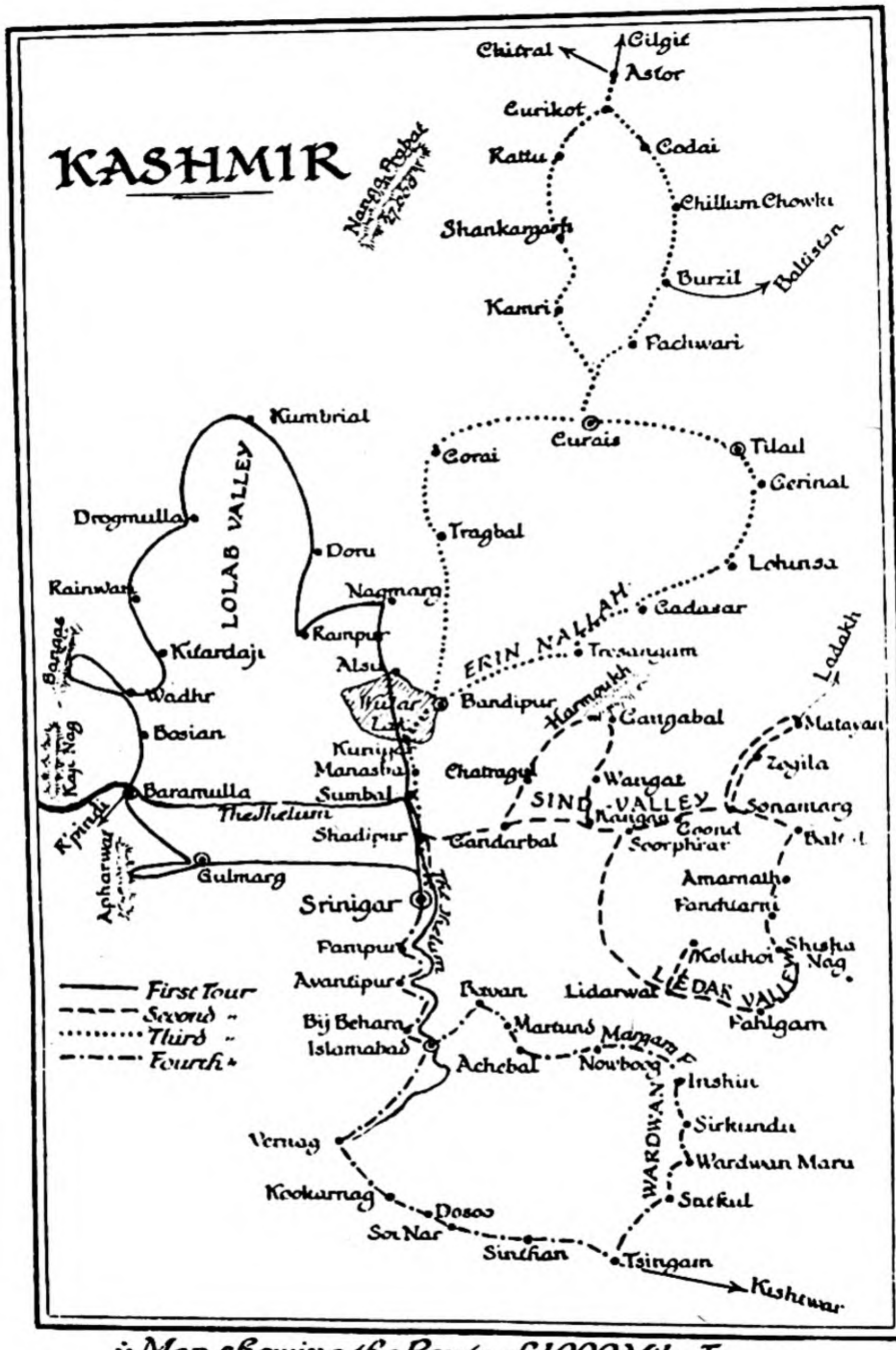
Leading my Men up the snow-bound Lopu-la into Tibet

CONTENTS

		PAGE
	EPISTLE DEDICATORY	ix
CHAP.		
I.	OFF TO KASHMIR	3
II.	IN THE CITY OF THE SUN	11
III.	IN THE LOLAB AND UP GULMARG	35
IV.	BACK TO SRINAGAR	73
V.	IN THE SINDH AND LEDAR VALLEYS	83
VI.	SRINAGAR AGAIN	149
VII.	TOWARDS GILGIT	157
VIII.	SRINAGAR ONCE AGAIN	189
IX.	KISHTWAR AND WARDWAN VALLEY	197
X.	LAST DAYS	221
	INDEX	239

" Better to strive and climb
And never reach the goal,
Than to drift along with time
An aimless, worthless soul:
Aye, better to climb and fall,
And sow though the yield be small,
Than to fill each night and day
An endless, purposeless rôle."

A. NEVE.



∴ Map showing the Route of 1,000 Miles Tramp ∴

"Live dreams, then *write* them; ay, but live them first.
So only may the eager spirit's thirst
Be quenched and satisfied. . . .
How poor were life, how small and mean a thing,
To peck like fowls, nor ever try the wing,
Nor ever beyond unknown summits fare,
Nor scale the ramparts of the upper air,
Nor lightly skim the seething waters o'er,
Nor dying fall upon the barren shore."

JAMES LAVER.

EPISTLE DEDICATORY

To

"Lalla"

" Know'st thou the Land where towering cedars rise
In graceful majesty to cloudless skies,
Where whiter peaks than marble rise around
And icy ploughshares pierce the flower-clad ground?
Know'st thou the cliffs above Sonamarg gorges dread
Where the great yaks with trembling footsteps tread,
Where keenest winds from icy summits blow
And chill the deserts of eternal snow?
Know'st thou it well? Oh, let us once more there,
Scale cliffs and granite avalanches dare."

A. NEVE.

EPISTLE DEDICATORY

MY DEAR LALLA,

Here's a little token of my affection and regard which I trust you will accept in the spirit in which it is inscribed to you. You know I do not keep a diary; consequently the scenes described and the conversations narrated herein are entirely the product of what my memory had stored up in its recesses. That being so, it is very likely that I have not been meticulously accurate in my descriptions of natural scenery nor scrupulously faithful in my narrations of conversations. But I am not much worried about these inaccuracies and infidelities as they are wholly unavoidable and do not, I believe, in the least affect the main purpose of the book. And that purpose was to present a complete picture of the varied activities and moods, of the phases of thought and sentiment in which "a liter'y gent" of certain age and disposition, with a passion for walking and mountain-climbing and not quite devoid of the sense of adventure and mysticism, indulged during a very happy and strenuous period of six months spent in rambling among some of the finest scenery that is to be seen anywhere in this round world of ours. Mind, I say—"a *complete* picture." I am led to lay emphasis on this, for

in my last travel-book, having been actuated by a like desire, I naturally wrote of *all* the leading events of that world-tour of mine, among them being certain incidents, the inclusion of which I deemed necessary, if I was to carry out the main intention of that work of mine. However, an Anglo-Indian newspaper took exception to this procedure of mine and, making of it a personal question, and forgetting the literary aspect of it, launched out in low personalities against the author. As incidents of a like nature again find place in this book, and as in one of them you yourself are indirectly concerned, I thought I might incidentally mention the reason why they are incorporated in the narrative which follows.

Ever, My dear Lalla,

Most faithfully and affectionately yours,

A. S. W.

"THE ORCHARD," HERMITAGE, BERKS.
April 11, 1921.

OFF TO KASHMIR

" Who has not heard of the Vale of Cashmere,
With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave,
Its temples, and grottos, and fountains as clear
As the love-lighted eyes that hang over their wave? "

MOORE.

CHAPTER I

OFF TO KASHMIR

MOORE is right! Who, indeed, has not heard of the Vale of Cashmere? I had heard of it even as a boy. A well-known Parsee journalist and author having then published a book on that ancient land of fabled charms, my mother secured an early copy of it and each night after dinner my sister and I sat listening to her as she read a couple of chapters from it to my father. Though the book is now little more than a memory to me, I have yet a distinct recollection of two things of which it spoke. Of the extreme beauty of Kashmiri women who had all, said the author, fair skin and rosy cheeks, and of the frail rope-bridges made of twisted birch-bark which one had frequently to cross before one reached Srinagar. The one kindled my boyish spirit of adventure as the other touched my dawning sense of beauty, and I had even then resolved that if ever I chanced to visit that fairyland I would tackle the most dangerous of its frail bridges of twisted birch-bark, and bring back with me the fairest and rosiest of its fair-skinned, rosy-cheeked damsels.

But such a chance never came my way for the

next thirty years, though in the meantime I had been twice to England and once completely round the world and over the whole of the Continent from Naples to the North Cape and from Budapest to Bantry Bay in Ireland. However, one sultry afternoon early in April, 1919, that long-awaited opportunity did at last cross my path and I went to the Bombay terminus of the B.B. & C.I. Railway and took my seat in the Northern Express for Rawal Pindi. By spreading out my luggage and making my friends, who had come to see me off, occupy the vacant seats, I managed to secure the whole compartment for myself and I was left in undisturbed possession of it for the two days I was in the Express. As the journey lay mostly through sparsely-cultivated fields and towards the later stages through the treeless sandy wastes of Rajputana, it would have proved to be extraordinarily long and tiresome, were it not for the three meal-hours in the restaurant-car which lumped together for the time being the scattered human load of the train and made it possible to bear up with its overpowering heat and increasing tedium.

I had arranged to break journey at Lahore and pass the day in sight-seeing with a friend of mine, but when I arrived at the station I was advised that as there had been serious rioting over-night in the city owing to the arrest of Mr. Ghandi and certain Punjabi leaders, and as everything was closed and not a carriage was to be had, I had better continue my journey. Conse-

quently, that same evening I arrived at Pindi and met by happy chance some old friends in whose company I left for Murree the following morning. Within two hours of starting we were on the wooded top of the famous hill-station where we spent the rest of the day taking long walks to principal points to get different views of the distant snow-clad Himalayas.

In a mail-motor the next forenoon I trundled down the Murree Hills amid scenes of Alpine grandeur till I came to Kohala and caught the first distant glimpse of Fair Kashmir and the far-famed Jhelum River. But for the rapidly-flowing waters of the Jhelum and the finely-designed bridge that spanned it, there was nothing particularly remarkable in what I saw. In fact, after being regaled for the best part of the day with the fine views which the Murree Hills commanded, the first sight of Kashmir was a positive disappointment: and though we came across some pretty scenery as we whizzed past the wooded heights of Dulai and ran by the picturesque headland of Domel, I saw nothing all that day to make me change the first impressions I had formed of Kashmir at Kohala. I passed the night at Garhi in the *dâk* bungalow there overlooking the river. And next morning having dressed, packed and *chota-hazried* in good time, I sat by the river-bank awaiting the mail-motor which was to continue and complete my journey. It was while thus seated by the river-side that I was for the first time made conscious

of the fact that I was actually in a fairyland innocent of the habitual restraints and tacit obligations of civilised society. For there on the opposite bank were bathing in the open waters of the river a number of fair women with nothing on them except what Mother Nature had provided them with at their birth. Batches of bold bathers gaily tripped to the river-bank, took off their one loose garment, rolled up their hair and ran down into the water. There they took half a dozen plunges, ran back, slipped on their *pehran* again and disappeared the next moment behind the trees that clustered thickly round that spot. A sight like this to an ordinary man from the outside world was bound to appear strange and indecent, but the river has a wide span all along Garhi and so from that distance with their slim fair bodies and raven tresses the fair bathers looked more like a troupe of sporting naiads as they splashed the glistening waters in their glee and laughed in the face of the sun.

However, as if the gods had got jealous of my viewing the sporting naiads for any length of time, the mail-motor rushed up and whirled me away from this fairy-scene up the hill-side studded with pine-trees and down through cultivated fields and open meadows. The scenery became bolder and more rugged as we approached Chenari and lofty precipices rose on either side as we flew past the next stage at Uri. The Jhelum contracts here, and the road makes a long detour up the valley and climbs several

hundred feet up a rocky spur before reaching Rampur where we halt for breakfast.

Leaving Rampur the road follows the river along the mountain-side till, gradually ascending, it takes a sharp curve and the next moment the far-famed Vale was opened to my wondering gaze. A wide expanse of open country with water-courses running hither and thither, interspersed with fields, lying fallow or half cultivated, and bounded at the extreme end with a solid phalanx of mountains partly covered with snow and sparse vegetation and partly hidden in a veil of flying mist and overhanging clouds.

This, then, was " the mountainous portal " of Moore, " that opes sublime the Valley of Bliss to the world "! This broadish patch of swampy land and mist-laden hills—" the Terrestrial Paradise of the Indies," which old Bernier said, " surpassed in beauty all that his warm imagination had ever anticipated." [1] The reader can imagine my amazement and my disappointment! In my distant southern home I was seeing visions of the ineffable beauty and paradisaical charms of the Happy Valley, and here was their magnificent realisation! However, the car ran down the curve and put an end to my unseasonable reflections. Soon we entered the muddy roads of Baramulla and, after leaving mail-bags at the post-office, we sped on through an unending avenue of white poplars towards Srinagar. Forty miles more of mud and Nur Jehan's poplars—

[1] François Bernier's *Travels in the Moghul Empire*, p. 400.

for it was she, the Light of the World, who had conceived the idea of planting that road with an avenue of those tall, gaunt trees—and we came to the glittering precincts of the City of the Sun with its shining tin-cased temple-roofs and its showy tinsel-shops, hanging out their gaudy ware in the streets for the gaze of the world. The city itself is soon entered and the next moment we are over its narrow wooden bridge; one more turn and we come to Pestonjee's Shop, the goal of all my two hundred miles of motoring.

IN THE CITY OF THE SUN

" Srinagar, the City of the Sun, in spite of dirt and squalor and its present low-lying situation must be ranked among the most beautiful in the East, and in its peculiar style unique."

YOUNGHUSBAND.

CHAPTER II

IN THE CITY OF THE SUN

HARDLY was I an hour in Srinagar when I got the first taste of its water-life. For down Peston-jee's Patan or landing-stage waited a long, narrow, flat-bottomed boat, *shikara* as it is called, to take me to the house-boat I had engaged months before for the season. No sooner had we stepped down the Patan and taken our seats in the little *shikara*, than it shot across the placid waters being paddled by four sturdy strokes from behind. We passed several house-boats moored along the bank under over-arching willows, and not long after took a turn inside the channel by the little isle where stood my boat. With its pointed prow and gabled roof the boat from a distance looked not unlike Noah's Ark. We presently came alongside the boat, and on entering it I made a regular tour of inspection from end to end, examining its limited stock of furniture and its ingenious arrangements to meet every con-ceivable want of the occupier. Being built but recently of wholly unstained pine-wood, the boat had not only a fresh look about it but the air inside was redolent with the lovely fragrance of the pine-wood. Being the first to engage her,

I had the right of naming her and so I called her *Constance*, after a very dear English friend of mine. Lying alongside this big boat was another smaller one ordinarily called cook-boat, with roof and sides made of rush-mats, which carried my kitchen and servants' quarters: and as the house-boats are let out in groups of three, the little *shikara* came to complete my own little fleet of three boats.

It took some days before I settled down to my new mode of life. In spite of ample accommodation, one at first experiences the proverbial feeling of being " cribbed, cabined and confined " inside an ordinary-sized house-boat. The low doorways, the creaking floor with planks fitted so badly as to make oneself and everything around one skip and see-saw as one walked on it, and the gloom of fitfully burning oil-lamps at night went to heighten that feeling of confinement. But I soon had the skipping planks put right, the bare walls enlivened by a set of exquisite water-colours from the brush of an English friend of mine and an artist of local repute, and the gloom inside the boat at night dispelled by a series of electric bulbs appropriately shaded by various delicately-tinted Japanese lanterns.

My floating-home being thus put right and my five Kashmiri servants having set about their work in proper order, I thought it was time I had a good look round the city and its environments. With that intention I took one morning my *shikara* down the Seven Bridges, viewing the

busy river-life and noticing as I passed the strange structures lining the river-front. Amira Kadal, the First Bridge, built of long wooden rafters with interspaces filled in with rubble and loose stones, presented a fine specimen of indigenous engineering skill and was the object first to catch the eye of the new-comer. The bridge passed, the gigantic Doric columns of the Maharaja's palace came in sight and shortly afterwards the whole palace stood fronting us—a strange combination of cheap plaster, tasteless colouring, and meaningless design. The *shikara*, however, soon left behind this monumental eyesore—witness alike of the decadence of Oriental art and of the proneness of the present-day Eastern mind to ape anything and everything Western regardless of its evident unsuitability to the peculiar environment and the special stock of ideals of the East. Presently we came upon a riverian scene that was at once Oriental and peculiarly Kashmiri. For now the broad expanse of the water was alive with heaving river-craft filled to overflowing with all kinds and conditions of things but with a single type of humanity. And lining both banks of the river were glistening tin-cased Hindu temples and less pretentious Mahomedan mosques of ample proportions interspersed with rows and rows of tall many-storied structures of wood and sun-dried bricks, which with their thin walls, crazy balconies, and disproportionate heights looked so shaky and unsafe from the river, and yet were strong enough for

their purpose and stood the yearly flood and frequent shocks of earthquake better than many a more solidly-built house in Srinagar.

Bridge after bridge is left behind, till we come to the last of them and then turn back and go up stream, which means slow progress and hard work for the *manjis*, but the steps leading down to the river being by now crowded with men, women and children, bent on their various errands, present an animated scene and provide enough food for the mind and novelty for the eye to wear off the tedium of the return journey. But the finest sight of all, it seems, was reserved for the last lap. For no sooner had we re-emerged from Amira Kadal and moved up the bend of the river, there opened to my enraptured gaze a scene of enchantment and surpassing loveliness. Not that the scene displayed life and colour in any special degree, nor was there about it anything of grandeur and majesty in the common acceptance of the terms. On the contrary, it was all small and soft and delicately-tinted, but the winter-tracery of poplars looked so exquisite on the banks hard by, the front of the Museum peered out so artistically from amidst soft, silvery spring foliage of the willows, the curve the river took a little further on was so graceful, and the little Tacht hill rose so appropriately above the bend and the distant snow-tipped hills seemed to provide such a perfect background for the entire scene that the whole composed a picture which for pure beauty of line

and extreme delicacy of colouring remained unsurpassed throughout my prolonged stay in the Happy Valley.

That first fleeting impression of the special charm and distinguishing beauty of Kashmiri riverian landscape was more than confirmed the next morning when I went out for a walk on the Bund, as the river embankment is called in Srinagar. I do not think the Bund proper extends for much over a mile, but in that short distance it provides a river-side walk that for certain immediate attractiveness and other enduring charms would bear comparison with the very best in the world. Especially in April that part of it running along what is known as the European Quarter was so perfectly fascinating that each morning of all the many days I stayed in the city I religiously walked the whole length of it, alternately admiring the gardens in their spring green with the fruit-trees all in perfect bloom and the whole range of the Pir Panjal covered from end to end with snow.

Tacht-i-Suleman, which is such a prominent landmark of Srinagar, drew me one morning all up its thousand feet height. From its top one gets a fine panoramic view of a great portion of the Happy Valley and of the Sun-City and of the whole of the Dhal Lake with its little isles of gold and silver and the world-famous Imperial gardens. Of the lake itself and its gardens I formed a closer acquaintance the following Sunday when the Chief Judge of the State took me in his *doonga*

for a whole day's cruise of the Dhal. Going in a *doonga* is a slow affair, but that is just in keeping with the spirit of the place. I had a Kashmiri *namdah*, that is an embroidered felt-mat, spread over on the wooden flooring of the *doonga*, and stretching myself on it and resting my head on a pile of cushions, I languorously watched the scene as it shifted from bend to bend. After going over the rushing tide of water at the Dhal Darwaza we entered one of the side-channels of the lake, commonly known as Nali Mar, which reminded me as it did Vigne before me of the old canals of Venice. We passed quite a collection of precious Kashmiri antiquities in the shape of ancient bridges and quaint old houses, and by many a devious curve came out at length on the lake and were before long walking in the Nasim Bagh itself. Apart from the antiquities there was nothing attractive about the canal except that purple irises filled the fields by its banks and Kashmiri tulips white and crimson grew wildly and most picturesquely on the cottage-roofs. Nor did the Bagh have any attraction of its own except in the idea of its being three hundred years old and the fact that it was the great Akbar who had measured it all out himself and arranged it and planted with his own hands some of those giant chenars, rows of which one saw stretching in the far distance.

Somewhat disappointed with Nasim Bagh, I again lay reclining against the soft cushions in the *doonga* as we were being leisurely punted

across, past the Isle of Chenars, to the world-famous Shalimar. I had read wonderful descriptions of that "Abode of Love" and had seen still more glowing pictures of it, and in consequence I imagined I would see a bit of veritable Eden-land, resplendent with the choicest flowers of earth and resonant with the murmur of magic fountains, where ambrosial breezes would fill the stately walks and "the splendid domes and saloons of Imperial Shelim" would come to complete a picture at once brilliant and historic. As the *doonga* entered the long channel leading to the garden and we got off to have our luncheon, I could scarcely take my eyes off the entrance in the happy anticipation of the wonders that awaited me inside it. My patience, however, was not taxed overmuch, for we were not long at our simple repast and presently entered the abode of the blest. There was nothing remarkable about the entrance, so we leisurely walked up the paved path underneath the spreading chenars, now looking at the glistening water hurrying down the central channel, then stopping to view the beds of pansies and tulips with sunken lawns and groves of fruit-trees at the far end. Thus walking idly we come to the stone platform of the first terrace, ascending which we stood admiring the marble pavilion and the score of water-jets, throwing up their irrepressible sparkling contents. Proceeding further still in the same leisurely manner, we made for the old brick and rubble wall covered with festoons of

rose-climbers, and then going up the steps we reached the second and then the third terrace, and we turned to the left and had not taken a dozen steps when a most entrancing prospect suddenly opened out to our rivetted gaze. For there over a hundred sparkling jets of water the clear-cut outline of the black marble column of the Queen's Pavilion rose and threw into bold relief the rounded masses of the glistening cascade falling from the terrace above, which latter receding in one broad sweep of spring green—touched here with a flake of exquisite pink of the peach-blossom and relieved there with the flame-torches of scarlet tulips—finally merged into sky-soaring masses of mighty Mahadev veiled all over in a pure white mantle of snow,—the whole, framed as it was by an over-arching branch of a chenar, formed a striking picture of the evanescence of human pomp and grandeur and the ever-abidingness of Nature's beauty and splendour.

It was some time before we could make up our mind to leave this scene of melancholy beauty and vanished glory and retrace our steps back to our *doonga* to see the last of the triad of Imperial gardens in the Dhal Lake. We once again punt across the placid waters in the same old leisurely way and reach the Nishat Bagh about tea-time. In this "Garden of Gladness" we follow the same procedure as at Shalimar and find the same flowers and fruit-trees, grassy lawns and central canal with water-jets as before, except that

there are no marble pavilions to break the monotony of ascending terraces which in this instance were conceived on a nobler and more spacious scale and numbered quite half-a-dozen. This *bagh*, being built almost on the ascending spur of an adjoining hill, commands in the repose of an evening such a fine prospect of the lake, with Hari Prabat coolly reflecting in the middle and the snows of the Pir Panjal aflame in the far distance, as to bring home to us, as we drink our tea lying down on the lawn, the exquisite beauty and truth of those words which broke out of the over-laden heart of Moore:

"Oh! to see it at sunset,—when warm o'er the Lake
Its splendour at parting a summer eve throws,
Like a bride, full of blushes, when ling'ring to take
A last look of her mirror at night ere she goes!

When the shrines through the foliage are gleaming, half shown,
And each hallows the hour by some rites of its own;
When the water-falls gleam, like a quick fall of stars,
And the nightingales hymn from the Isle of Chenars."

Delighted and charmed as I was with all that I saw in the Nishat and the Shalimar, I could not say that they came anywhere near the pictures I had limned of them in my mind's eye, nor did they leave any impression of lasting value on my heart or imagination. This was my experience not only in connection with the Royal gardens, but in fact with all things Kashmiri, the longer I lived in that land and the more I saw of it and its people. Not that the Kashmiri

people and things failed in their appeal to the eye or the mind. On the contrary, they did appeal to one instantly and unmistakably. But where they failed was in the matter of the heart and the soul. A concrete instance will perhaps make my meaning clear. The beauty of the Kashmiri women is proverbial and has attracted the notice of all travellers from the remotest periods. The earliest of these, Marco Polo and François Bernier, gallantly pay their homage to it, and the latest women-writers, Marion Doughty and the Hon. Mrs. Bruce, make graceful references to it. And the compliment paid by men-writers, though naturally a bit strained, is not any the less deserved on that account. For though " the female form divine " encountered there does not by any means seem divine or even remarkable, nor does the face of a Kashmiri woman possess beauty that has even a tinge of intellectuality about it or is of a type that is in any sense " rare and of earth unseen," still as far as mere outward appearance goes the woman's face there could certainly be said to possess features of remarkable delicacy and symmetry, and the lines of her figure at times flow in faultless curve and statuesque precision. On many an occasion I have sat enchanted in my *shikara* raptly gazing at a face as clear-cut as in an ancient cameo or at a figure as full and supple as in the statue of a Greek goddess, and thought how natural it was " for all and every individual of the Court of the Great Mogul to select wives

from them," as Bernier said they did. But the faultless faces and precise lines of these Kashmiri women left me as cold and as unaffected as the cameos and statues after which they took. They came, it is true, near enough to my heart, but never once entered it: they captivated my æsthetic sense, but never once subdued my soul.

I had been by then quite two weeks in that land of beauty and brightness; and the care-free, *dolce far niente* mode of existence to which it so ideally lent itself and irresistibly seduced one, seemed to have spread over my life an atmosphere of serene pleasure and perfect tranquillity. Time even to me became a thing of no importance. One day was as another,—" like beads in careless teller's hands, the hours dropped unconsidered by." However, as I basked in this sunlight of pleasure and tranquillity there came over my spirit a strange feeling of restlessness, which try as I would to suppress, grew each day more irrepressible till at the end of the following week it became quite unbearable and almost oppressive. To get rid of it, I thought of a change of scene and of a more active mode of life and, as the guide-books I had with me suggested Lolab Valley for that time of the year, I planned a three-weeks' walking-tour of that valley.

My friends, however, told me that as the rather ambitious tour I was proposing to take would mean long fatiguing marches in all conditions of weather and entail climbing of mountains several thousand feet high, I had better fit myself

for that venture by making little mountain-excursions up the rocky ramparts which guard the Dhal Lake on the east. To carry out that excellent suggestion of theirs, early one afternoon orders were passed for the *Constance* and her two companion vessels to move up the river, and before long the little fleet of three had entered the lake and was seen progressing leisurely on it—so leisurely indeed that it seemed scarcely to ruffle the translucent waters which reflected undisturbed the mountains and vegetation around. After cruising thus for some four hours, we espied a sheltered bay, known as Karapur, and finding it conveniently situated for the mountain-excursion we had planned for the following day, we stopped there for the night.

Early next morning, as the lake lay reposed in the lap of night, I woke up, and ere yet the stars had faded away I jumped off the boat with my *khitmadgar*, Raheema, and commenced my first climb up a Kashmiri mountain, little knowing then that I was ascending the first hundred feet of the hundred thousand I was eventually to ascend, and tramping the first mile of the thousand I was destined to tramp. In the keen morning air we made the ascent up the glen above the village of Bren in less time than we expected, and reached the half-way halting-point of the Zairat of Baba Gulamuddin just as the sun peeped above the mountain-crest and plunged the whole scene in a flood of living gold. Here resting awhile and engaging a guide we com-

menced the second half of our ascent. The way lay through fields of tall, succulent plants with flowers just bursting on them, and walking through them was, consequently, pleasant enough: but before long the fields left us and the scenery became wild and rugged and the track in keeping with it became steep and erratic and was littered all over with large rough boulders. Going over such a steep, rough track meant real work for limbs and more for lungs, and so we proceeded haltingly, stopping every now and again to take long breaths and rest our tired limbs. At such moments the clumps of crown-imperials that grew in wild luxuriance all over the hill-side were particularly welcome, as they took the mind off our wearisome walk and agreeably relieved the extreme monotony of the scene around. Thus after two hours and more of alternate climbing and resting we came to the top of the ridge, called Chergand, some 9,400 feet high,[1] and found it covered with mounds of snow at places quite ten feet deep. The extensive view from the top fully made up, I thought, for whatever exertion we were put to in attaining it. On either side vast tracks of the Happy Valley lay open to our view. On one hand could be seen Dachigam and the whole of the Pampur Valley with the glistening Jhelum working its way towards Islamabad in long sinuous curves, while

[1] The reader must remember that Srinagar itself is 5,600 feet above sea-level, so going up Chergand I had climbed not quite 4,000 feet.

on the other there stretched the Dhal and the City with the whole range of the snowy Pir Panjal in the haze of the far distance. Refreshing ourselves with what little we had with us, we moved away to go down by another track which the guide said was shorter and without obstructions of any kind. And so indeed it proved to be, but in a way quite different from what we had expected. For we had not gone down many hundred yards when the path of a sudden disappeared and the descent next moment turned into an almost perpendicular grassy drop of a few hundred feet. On my remonstrating with the guide for bringing us on such a track, he coolly replied that he had promised the *Sahib* a way short and obstructionless and he had not failed in his promise as the *Sahib* could see for himself. Evidently the fellow had a vein of humour in him! One became unsteady as one stood on such a giddy slope. To attempt going down it on one's feet unaided by hands would, in consequence, have been like tempting Providence. A "Crawling Order" was thereupon issued and in compliance with it we sat down and stretched out our feet and raising ourselves on our hands began to crawl down the horrible slope on all fours, stopping but once to commend our guide for venturing to lead us on an enterprise so full of possibilities and novel experiences. We, however, took no chances, but made sure of every step we took till once again we picked up a distinct track, and after that we practically ran down past

Baba's Zairat and through Shirazi Bagh to our boat by the lake-side.

Once on board the *Constance*, orders were immediately passed to move her forward across the lake and make for the port and harbour of Nasim Bagh. But as often happens—"Man proposes and God disposes," our little fleet had late that afternoon almost approached the Nasim Bagh, when of a sudden there rose a squall of wind which, in spite of the united effort of all my five *manjis* to resist it, sent the whole fleet scurrying back and would have to all appearance kept us pressing back interminably had not the embankment of the road running across the lake fortunately come to our rescue and provided us with the haven we so sorely needed. Later on in the evening the wind dropped as suddenly as it had risen, but as the sun had set by that time and the men were quite fagged out by the day's exertion, I chose to stop there for the night and the boats were accordingly moored to the embankment. Next day, instead of going to the Nasim, we made straight for the Shalimar, as I had planned to go on the day following up Burza Kut—a peak nearly 11,000 feet high above Telbal on the extreme north of the Dhal.

We knew we had a long day's work before us, so we started as the first streak of dawn illumined the eastern sky. The first six miles of it meant a long, tedious tramp round corn fields and over hurrying streams till the village of Telbal was reached. Passing through it we struck upon a

mountain-path which the guide said would take us to our day's objective. And as the path apparently lay in that direction, we without questioning followed his lead. However, when we had gone some three miles and more, a *gujjar* [1] met us and, as is the custom of the country, inquired of my *khitmadgar* as to what had brought us to the mountains and where we were going. His curiosity being satisfied, he casually remarked that we were on the wrong track and, pointing to a path far away across a *nallah* on the opposite spur of the hill, said that that was the way to Burza Kut. Being taken by surprise by his remarks I called the guide and questioned him what he meant by misdirecting our steps and wasting our precious time and energy. He joined his hands and begged to be forgiven for not knowing the right way. I asked amazed, if that was so, why had he offered his services to me. Adopting the same attitude as before, he begged to assure me that he would not make a second mistake of that kind. I was glad to get his assurance, but not choosing to have our past experience of his guidance repeated, we started on our own to go down and across the *nallah* to repair our mistake. That meant going over sharp stones and a risky crossing over the water-course. But it had to be done, and another hour saw us on the right track and nearing the *busti* or habitation of Chatarhom, a mountain-village, the tall, storied wooden

[1] Goatherd.

houses of which rose most picturesquely up a sloping ridge by the side of a rapidly-flowing mountain-stream. Having drunk large draughts of the clear, cool, sparkling water of the stream and requisitioned the services of a local guide, we set out again to do the rest of our ascent. Up and up we went for quite two hours, hoping each minute that the next turn would reveal the peak and end our toil. But it was all in vain. For the longer we went, the higher the mountain seemed to rise. It was now getting on to noon, and though we could judge by the depth of the valley below that we had climbed very high indeed, there was no sign as yet of the peak of Burza Kut. We toiled on nonetheless and soon found ourselves on a snow-covered slope with a clump of spruce-firs on the top. I made for the firs and had hardly emerged from them when I felt as if one of the " magic casements," of which Keats speaks in his *Ode to a Nightingale*, had of a sudden opened and I were transported to " faery lands forlorn." For there in front of me stretched a vast amphitheatre of snow-bound mountains, over which broad patches of sunlight swept hurriedly past, and commanding which stood the glacial heights of Haramoukh, half lost in clouds, the whole composing a scene as wonderful to behold as impossible to describe. A few steps more and there lay yawning at our feet the seemingly measureless chasm of the Valley of the Sindh, from the dark depths of which the river threw furtive glances at us

through the breaks in the spruce-forest. But the great objective in pursuit of which we had scaled so many thousand feet was not attained, nor could we attain it though it lay tantalisingly within our reach. The reason was that the short distance of a few hundred yards that separated us from the peak of Burza Kut was absolutely snow-bound, and consequently the guide refused to take the risk of taking me over it, wearing as I was ordinary leather-boots. Had it been a couple of months later, I would have, in spite of the remonstrances of the guide, attempted it, but at the moment, though I had in many parts of the world come into intimate contact with snow, I was comparatively a novice at snow-work. It was a bitter disappointment and a real trial to be deprived of an object that seemed to lie almost within my grasp. But they had to be borne and I consented to sink my present differences with Nature in discussing the contents of my knapsack. Long I lingered over my frugal repast and greedily did I partake of the feast of regal splendour which prodigal Nature had spread before my devouring eyes, and it was well past mid-day when with reluctant feet and slow I retraced my way down the pass and towards my boat. The long twin-rows of chenars lining the canal of Shalimar were already casting long shadows when afte five hours of continuous tramp I reached my floating home. But a couple of cups of strong tea, followed by a bath of scalding hot water with a vigorous rub-down,

seemed to take off a good deal of the fatigue of the day, and what was left of it was all charmed away reading letters, that had arrived while I was away, from home and dear friends in England and America. The following day we left our moorings by the Shalimar and worked our way across the lake and through Nali Mar back to Srinagar.

Once I was back in the city, I busily set about arranging for my proposed tour of the Lolab Valley. With that intention I went to a well-known local Agency and arranged for my tents and camp-equipment and secured the two best guide-books on Kashmir, namely Dr. Duke's and Dr. Neve's; while my men were busy laying in stores of bread, butter, rice, flour and such tinned provisions as would be of use to us in the far-off valley. After paying a round of calls and fixing the spot where my fleet was to be stationed while I was away from the city, I left Srinagar early one Thursday morning in a matted *doonga* hired for the trip down the river and across the Wular Lake to Alsu whence I intended commencing our tour.

Both the banks presented a busy scene as the *doonga* slowly made its way through the seven bridges. Once on the open river, extra hands were employed at the poles and, the current helping us, we made rapid progress down the river. But such progress was only of short duration, for there rose a strong wind and the clouds seemed to gather in the direction of Wular Lake,

and then it was as much as we could do to make the boat keep to her course. Early in the afternoon as we approached Shadipur the storm that was brewing all that morning at last burst, and with such a vigour that we were forced to seek shelter under one of the magnificent chenars that lined the river there. Owing to this unexpected set-back we could proceed that evening only as far as Sumbul where we had to stay for the night.

But the set-back proved a blessing in disguise, since it gave me an opportunity of seeing next morning " the little Manasbal Lake " under ideal conditions. The entrance to it lay through a narrow uninteresting canal overgrown with nameless weeds and brushwood, the tedium of passing through which was quickly and amply rewarded on emerging upon the open, translucent waters of the lake. So open and translucent indeed were the waters and so very deep that they reflected as in a mirror splendid a perfect picture of the encircling works of man and Nature. And how simple were the works! A mere semi-circular range of hills with a few overhanging clouds, some non-descript trees and a line or two of crumbling wall having nothing grand or elaborate or enthralling about their contour or their colouring. And yet there was such delicacy in the spring-green of the trees, such subtlety in the contour of the encircling hills and such brilliancy in the clouds and in the crystalline waters and, to complete it all, the age-worn crumbling walls of the *Lalla*

Rookh garden lent just such a touch of melancholy grandeur as was needed to turn that inanimate scene of natural beauty and untampered loveliness into a really noble piece of scenery alive with solemn meaning and inspiring purpose. As I lay stretched in my little *shikara* entranced by the wonderful prospect in front of me, I felt how justly Sir Francis Younghusband called little Manasbal "the supreme gem of all Kashmir"[1] and how perfectly Mrs. Villiers Stuart echoed my own sentiments when she spoke of it in her great book on the Moghul Gardens[2] as "the loneliest and loveliest of all Kashmir lakes."

We moved further down the river that day, and late in the afternoon we came to Bunyari at the head of the Wular, and though it is the largest fresh-water lake in all India, we could have easily crossed it and reached our destination that evening, but the lake has a bad reputation among the Kashmiri boatmen for springing up a breeze at its own sweet will and turning turtle any boat that dared to venture out on it except in the early hours of the morning. And the worst of it all is that the boatmen are afraid of its capriciousness and stand in constant dread of its destructive powers, and that, I believe, is the secret of all its strong hold on their nerves and imagination. When at four early next morning we put forth to cross it,

[1] *Kashmir*, p. 37.
[2] *Gardens of the Great Mughals*, p. 158.

there actually sprang up a stiff breeze which sent the waters dashing against the side of our boat. I am sure, were we crossing the lake in the afternoon, the boatmen would have lost nerves and broken out chattering and sobbing as is their wont like so many helpless children. But being early in the morning they felt safe and so went on doing their work with the poles in their habitual impassive manner, only a little hurriedly. Alsu, our destination, was reached before long and we got off and piled up our camp-equipment on the shore to commence at once our tour of the Lolab Valley.

IN THE LOLAB & UP GULMARG

" There are few more charming spots in Kashmir than the Lolab. If it lacks the wild grandeur of the Sind or the majestic splendour of the Gurais or the calm expanse of the Dal and the Manasbal, it has a sylvan beauty all its own and nowhere excelled."—JOSHUA DUKE.

CHAPTER III

IN THE LOLAB AND UP GULMARG

WHEN we had landed at Alsu and had counted off our camp-kit, Raheema was sent off to search out and bring back with him the *lumbardar* of the village. I was, however, left kicking my heels for an hour or more when Raheema returned followed by a long-bearded patriarchal-looking individual in full grey toga, who reverently *salaamed* as he approached me. Knowing by now the ways of the country and the tone to be adopted in talking to petty officials if one desired to have one's wishes carried out, I peremptorily ordered him to bring me thirteen coolies to carry my things up Nagmarg. "No coolie in the whole village, *Sahib*," replied the *lumbardar* in a half-apologetic tone. "Yesterday the *Junglat-Sahib* took away sixty coolies to the Lolab. If the *huzoor* would wait at Alsu for three days, they would surely return and then the *huzoor* could be happy and have as many as the *huzoor* liked." "Wait here for three days!" I repeated, almost overcome with the atrocious suggestion, "I won't wait here for three hours"; and then lifting my spiked walking-stick over his head, I continued, "This you will get if you don't immediately produce the thirteen

coolies I want, but if you do, you will have good *buksheesh*. Have your choice. But one of the two you will assuredly get in any circumstance." The raised stick had the desired effect, for he hurried away saying, "When the *Sahiö* wanted anything how could a poor *lumbardar* say no to it?" I also sent Raheema to keep an eye on him, since I was warned that the Kashmiri village officials have a way of their own in matters like these. They readily acquiesced in everything one told them to do and then coolly walked off and made themselves scarce for the rest of the day. However, the *lumbardar* returned after an hour and reported that not a coolie was to be had, but as the *ikbal* of the *huzoor* was great, he had somehow produced the number ordered and now waited for the *buksheesh*. I replied he had done well and he would certainly have the promised *buksheesh*. At that moment Raheema stepped up and said that the *lumbardar* should have nothing but stripes from the *huzoor*, as he himself had pulled the men out of their cottages, while the *lumbardur* instead of helping him had attempted to slink away and he had to make a free use of his cane to keep him with him and prevent the coolies from running away. "Well, what have you to say to this?" I asked turning to the *lumbardar*. "Nothing, *Sahib*," replied the wily old fellow joining his hands. "As the presence could see for himself, the requisite number of men ordered by the presence have been produced and I am their *lumbardar*. That is all I want to say and

nothing more." As the men were there, I said, I would keep my word and give him the *buksheesh*, provided he saw that all my baggage was properly distributed among the thirteen men. For the next half-hour sleepy old Alsu presented a scene of jabbering, gesticulating crowd of coolies pushing and pulling one another to secure the lightest pieces of camp-kit to carry. Much amused I watched the animated scene, and about noon when the last man had tied up his load and strapped it on his back, and our party began to make a move, we found the whole village had turned out to see the procession march past their doors.

For the first four miles all went well, going as it was over an easy gradient. The coolies and servants kept well together and I found no difficulty in keeping them in sight of me. But once the steeper ascents commenced, the laggards took to halting at every hundred steps and were soon left behind. However, I steadily walked on and, when we had been some three hours on the march, word was brought up to me that one of the coolies was taken seriously ill and was unable to continue the march. I immediately hurried down to the place and found the man stretched at full length on the ground with his load lying beside him. On being questioned as to what had gone wrong with him, the man replied: "*Bookhar akdem chur gaya, Sahib*"—"The fever has risen very high, *Sahib*." Being yet quite raw and not schooled into the little tricks of the Kash-

miri coolie, I was for once taken in by the piteous moans of the man and so ordered my *khitmadgar* to relieve him immediately and engage another coolie. But I forgot that we were in the heart of a forest and not a vestige of human life was to be seen anywhere. From where, then, was the required coolie to be produced? I dropped a hint that my servants should split up the load among themselves. But they looked positively alarmed at the suggestion, and Raheema, taking up his own cause and that of his aggrieved companions, strongly protested that for a *Sahib's khitmadgar*, bearer or *khansama* to carry any baggage was a thing unheard-of. I suggested in the last resort that the sweeper might be induced to carry the load. But the sweeper stepped forward and protested with equal vehemence: "No, Sir, not the sweeper. How can a sweeper carry a burden?" "Why not?" I asked amazed. "It is degrading and against all rules," rejoined the outraged individual with a strong sense of what he owed to himself and the caste to which he belonged. I was not surprised at the answer, for I was fairly well acquainted with the curious anomalies of the Hindu caste-system. But to one who is not conversant it will strike as strange that a man who earned his living by doing the meanest work to which a human being could possibly be put and belonging as he did to the lowest of the low castes and practically "untouchable," should yet consider it degrading for him to do the work of a caste much higher up

in the scale of social hierarchy. Leaving this matter of caste-anomalies aside and coming back to our immediate difficulty,—how were we to carry the load up? The rest of the twelve coolies had their full and more than their full load. For a moment I stood nonplussed! The next instant, however, one of my men espied a youth ploughing with his team of oxen up a neighbouring hill. Raheema instantly volunteered to run up the hill and not to return till he had secured the man. And he must have succeeded in hunting down his quarry pretty soon, for he before long returned with the youth who without difficulty was prevailed upon with inducements of liberal *buksheesh* to take up the ill-fated load.

And so up and up we went till at sun-down we came right to the top of the grassy uplands of Nagmarg covered here and there with large patches of snow and spruce-firs, in a clearing of which latter we presently caught sight of the *junglat*-bungalow, where we proposed to seek shelter for the two nights we were to be on the marg. Not long after we reached the bungalow itself and noticed the snow lying thick all round it, and later on when I entered this temporary home of mine I found a mound of ice and snow completely blocking the back-verandah and running half-way up its roof, forming a kind of ice-cavern with lateral branches projecting into the bath-rooms on its two sides. It made me shiver as I beheld the glistening mound. The rest of the bungalow, from being kept locked

up through the winter, looked and felt so damp and uninhabitable that the prospect of passing two nights in it did not seem particularly cheering. And when the *chowkidar* incidentally mentioned that as it was still early in the season there was not a soul living on the marg or within four miles of it, it did not very much improve the look of things. To add to our discomfiture and complete our isolation on that cold dreary height, came the gang of coolies importunately demanding their wages as they wished to go down to Alsu that very night. The *chowkidar* took me aside and begged of me not to give them their wages, which if I gave, I would practically be stranded on the marg, for the coolies with all their promises would never return once they were paid off. So I turned to the coolies and said I would give them their wage when they had taken me down to the next stage I was going; in the meanwhile they must remain with me. Half a dozen of them shouted out together that that would mean "death to them," for they had provided themselves with no food and none was to be had on the marg. Well, I said, if they insisted on going down, they were free to please themselves, but let them be assured that not a *pie* of their wage would they have from me until they saw me to my next stage. That, they replied, they were willing to do and would positively return the following evening; wouldn't the *Sahib* in the meantime give them something for tea? "Most assuredly," I replied, and ordered the *khitmadgar* to give them

a rupee. They were overjoyed at the idea of their request being promptly granted, and so, when the rupee was handed over to be distributed among them, they ran down the steps of the bungalow laughing and chatting in their own rough child-like way which did one's heart good to watch. At any rate that rough hilarity of the coolies took the edge off the gloom that was fast settling down on us. Later on when the *khitmadgar* came and asked me as to what I proposed having for the evening meal, I replied that as a hot meal was out of the question owing to the lateness of the hour, I would have what they had ready at hand, only that I would like to have at once some steaming hot tea and a bath, and asked him in the meantime to set the *anguthi* (fire-place) going. "No, no," put in the *khitmadgar*, "that must never be. The *huzoor* will not only have a hot bath and tea but a hot meal of soup, a meat course and pudding." I stared at him in blank amazement, for it was then past seven, and yet not long after nine I was seated beside the fire, having had my tea and bath, with the promised hot meal spread before me. The wood being wet, the fire burned badly, and the chimney being not used through the long winter smoked horribly, still on a cold night like that, with snow all round and no companion to while away the tedious hour after meal, the mere sight and presence of fire was companionship enough and seemed to cheer me so that, tired as I was with the day's long march, I sat by it well into

midnight leisurely talking over the following day's plans with my *khitmadgar*.

When I woke up late the following morning it was very, very cold and rain was falling in a steady drizzle. In such weather one doesn't know what one could do with one's self. The ground being sodden I could not move out, nor could I sit and read or write, it being so bitterly cold. And yet I had to do something to keep myself warm, and so I ran up and down the front verandah, varying the monotony of running by doing Sandow or skipping and breaking out into a step-dance. But such enforced gymnastics and that erratic romping "on the light fantastic toe" were getting on my nerves, and I was wondering how long the weather and the Fates would combine to make me a martyr to them, when the rain of a sudden ceased and it brightened up and shortly afterwards the sun came out. Taking advantage of this bright spell, I went out for a walk on the grassy marg, and happening to look through a break in the serried ranks of spruce-firs, to my joy and surprise I saw stretched before me the entire length of the thickly-wooded and widely-extending Lolab Valley. But I did not stop very long to survey and enjoy this beautiful prospect, for I had arranged to go up the highest peak of Nagmarg that very morning, and it was getting on to ten when we started to climb it. It was a slow process going up that peak, for mounds of snow lay barring our way every hundred feet we

ascended and, rising steeply as they did, going over them often meant loss of time and, not infrequently, of temper. The worst of them were, however, negotiated and we came right on to the top covered wholly with some ten to twenty feet of soft snow, and from there beheld a wonderful white world extending for miles and miles around. All over the extended Changmar Range and deep down the Valley of Varnow lay snow, heavy and unmelting, except where a hardy fir dared to project its bare branches or a massive rock broke the blinding tyranny of the white world. But regardless of the tyranny I spread my waterproof-cape over a mound of snow and coolly sat down to survey the magnificent panorama—too novel and wonderful for words.

It was past noon when I returned to the bungalow and had my bath and broke my fast. And in the evening when I again went out for a short stroll on the marg, I beheld the welcome sight of a long line of coolies approaching me. They *salaamed* low as they walked past, and sat talking by the fire long into the night, and the next day by nine they were all saddled on, each with his respective load, and a little later the whole team might have been seen going down Nagmarg with its khaki-clad, sun-helmeted unit marching as usual at its head.

That day being bright and sunny and the march being only of six miles and all down thickly-wooded hills, we reached Rampur our

objective by noon practically fresh. I had intended putting up in the forest bungalow there, but a touring-party from the Residency was just then passing through Rampur and the bungalow was, in consequence, in its possession. I had therefore to fall back on my tent which I had immediately pitched on a dry, somewhat elevated spot beside a clump of fine deodars. That was my first experience of camp-life, and the day being warm and bright, well I enjoyed the free, open-air existence to which it gave such a ready access.

The little village of Rampur, lying snugly as it did between pine-clad hills and enlivened as it then was by bright patches of fruit-trees in blossom, attracted me the very first time I saw it. But that mere attraction deepened into a real fondness when I went out late that afternoon on a long stroll on the Sopor track over undulating meadow-lands of unmatched loveliness brightened here with masses of wild apple-blossoms and made vocal there with the never-ending chaunt of a purling stream,—the whole country looking as it were a series of English woodland glades in the liveliest of its lively spring-garbs. Amid scenes of such surpassing beauty and enchantment I loitered long and late, and the moon was already up and high in the heavens when I returned in a sort of half-wakeful, abstracted mood to the camp, only to find it in a state of great flurry and commotion. I thought somebody had been taken suddenly ill

or something serious had happened while I was away. Imagine, therefore, my surprise when Raheema rushed out of my tent with a letter in his hand and said in an excited tone: "*Rajident Memsahib* sent this for the *hazoor* two hours ago." I on the instant guessed the nature of its contents, and on opening the letter I found I was not wrong in my surmise. It was an invitation to dinner at the Residency Encampment. As it was very nearly half-past eight and the invitation was for eight, I made Raheema run for all he was worth to pay my best respects and make my profound apologies to the *Rajident-Memsahib* and tell her that I had just returned to camp and would follow him in a few minutes. So after having a hasty wash, I followed him at a double quick pace, vaulting recklessly over patches of water and stumbling badly over half-seen boulders, and reached the Encampment just as the small Residency Party was sitting down to dinner. My hostess instantly came out on the verandah and greeted me and took me to my seat, and I had a most enjoyable time the two hours I was with the party. My hostess, in particular, was such an attractive conversationalist and did the honours of her position with such unaffected grace and spontaneous cordiality that in that short space of time I felt as if I had known and talked to her all my life, though in fact I had never met her nor even seen her before.

Next morning being bright and cloudless I attempted to go up the highest of the neighbouring

hills, which in the unsentimental terminology of the State Survey Department was dubbed Kahoota Station Hill. We started our climb up a rocky flower-strewn track which, after wandering wildly through clumps of pines and running aimlessly over the cultivated patches by *gujjars'* huts, at last made for the top of the Station from where we beheld, as the guide-book had promised, "an uninterrupted view of the snowy range all round." We had arranged to strike camp early the following morning and march to our next halting-place, Doras, some ten miles away. But it seems that day I was to experience the common vicissitudes of camp-life and learn the futility of making any definite plans where so much depended on the moods of Nature and promises of men. For when I woke up in the morning, rain was falling fast, the ground all round was wet and soaking, and my poor tent, which was so trim and taut and spotlessly clean the day before, looked quite limp and bedraggled. I sat up helplessly in my camp-bed not knowing what to do. The hours dragged wearily along, and when at last the rain held off and it looked as if we would after all be able to make a start later on in the day, the *khitmadgar* brought me word that the *makarwan* had not come with his ponies as he had promised the previous evening to do. I asked him what he meant by coming to me and speaking in that helpless tone. Didn't he know the obvious way out of the difficulty? If the *makarwan* would not come to us with his ponies,

we must go to him and return driving him and his ponies back to our encampment. The simple advice had the desired effect, for a couple of hours afterwards a cavalcade of heavily-laden ponies might have been seen winding its way up the zig-zag forest-road towards its distant goal.

The Kashmiri Forest Department has got its own set of roads made through the length and breadth of the Lolab Valley. Perhaps the shadiest and prettiest of them all is the one we took that afternoon between Rampur and Doras. As the afternoon advanced the sky assumed a threatening aspect, and when we were within a couple of miles of our destination, the thunder which had been for a long while rumbling and drumming in the distance at last overtook us and a deafening peal sent us hurrying forward at our best pace. But there was such a downpour, with rain and hail intermixed, that the road soon turned into a quagmire and the most we could do was not to stop but make whatever little progress we could towards the forest bungalow at Doras in the hope of being eventually under the shelter of a solid roof. And when we reached it in the evening it seemed a veritable abode of luxury, so clean and comfortable its dry, airy rooms looked after our late experience of mud and wet.

The Doras bungalow is built at the foot of an immense hill, overlooking the wide extent of a cultivated valley. Over that immense hill I ascended with a guide the following day, and when after a three hours' stiff and steady climb

we came to the top the whole of the Lolab Valley lay at our feet in the shape of a giant U. From here I had a fine prospect of the Lolab country —a great blue well-watered plain lying out for leagues and leagues before me with the shapes of mysterious, snow-clad mountains receding in endless series in the far distance. That the valley was so thickly-wooded, so well-watered, and so very extensive I had no idea till I beheld this vast panorama from the top of the Doras Hill.

The next march to Kumbrial was long and fatiguing. However, the first part of it, which lay through a thick jungle, proved to be cool enough and not quite devoid of interest. But once the villages of Chandigam and Sogam were left behind, the way passed through flat open country over dusty roads, the tedium of tramping on which was momentarily relieved when we came upon the rapidly-flowing, glacier-fed waters of the Lolab, from which the valley takes its name and to which primarily it owes its distinguishing beauty of wide park-like expanse of fields and meadowlands dotted all over with clusters of wooden cottages and groves of walnut-trees. After walking for a mile or two along the river-bank, we crossed the river itself and later on lost sight of it, and the march thereafter became a long, weary trudge of several miles till we came to Kumbrial, which being right in the middle of the lower bend of the U of the valley might in a sense be said to be the heart and centre of the Lolab. From it the two vast arms

of the valley project towards the south, and one commands a wonderful view from the high eminence on which the forest bungalow is so charmingly situated. Having long and too closely confined myself to the main valley, I felt I was missing some of its vital charms, so thought of taking a day off into one of the side valleys. And Kumbrial provided me with just such an opportunity, for the guide-book said that the little side valley of the Pohru River was worth investigating. So having engaged a guide over-night, I left with him at day-break and leisurely followed up the little mountain-stream almost up to the glacier which feeds it. And well I enjoyed that day off, away from the over-powering height and soul-subduing expanse of Nature to quieter enjoyment among her closely-circumscribed scenes and less pretentious possessions.

The weather which was in splendid humour all these many days, again got into a nasty temper that night and continued to be so the following morning on which we had to make our next move forward to Tregam. To add to our annoyance came the news that cholera had broken out in the villages near where we had planned to go. On the instant we changed our programme and, when the rain ceased, instead of going to Tregam we marched towards Drogmulla. The sky was overcast with heavy leaden clouds which exactly reflected our own mood for the moment, and the condition of the roads served to complete our

discomfiture. They looked smooth and well-made, but the moment we took a step, the foot stuck fast in the sticky surface. At each step, therefore, the foot had to be deliberately pulled off from the agglutinated grip of the road, and walking was in consequence made a regular imposition. My men grumbled audibly, lashed the ponies unnecessarily, and we all seemed to have handed over ourselves, tied hand and foot, to the blue devils. In moments like these it is strange how a trifling incident changes the whole aspect of things! Our *khansama* being somewhat old, the last few marches had told on him, and as he felt much too tired to march that day, I told the *khitmadgar* to arrange for a pony to carry him to our next encampment. Being short and thick-set and having a short, bushy beard he looked a veritable Sancho Panza as he gaily sallied forth on his tiny mount and slyly watched our gloom and discomfiture. But we had not proceeded far when the pony took into its head to exercise its hind limbs with the natural consequence that the poor old fellow went clean over its head and fell flat into the mud. Sancho Panza made a funny sight as he involuntarily took that rather risky somersault, and my Kashmiri servants and pony-men who were but a moment before so silent and moody, instead of going to his help, burst out into roars of laughter. I was for some reason or other walking in the rear of the cavalcade and so was a witness of the whole scene; and though it was as much as I could do to repress my own

46980

laughter, I shouted out to my men to help Sancho Panza to his feet. But the old fellow seemed for once to be as nimble with his limbs as he was habitually with my money, and so was on his feet before even his companions had ended their unseasonable laughter, and with exemplary nonchalance began to flick off the mud from his hands and feet and then, as if nothing had happened, mounted his wily creature once again and rode at the head of us all. The grand result of this slight misadventure was that the clouds which were weighing down our spirits burst with my men's laughter, and we tramped all the ten miles to the forest bungalow at Drogmulla in our usual good humour.

The bungalow here, as in the case of that at Kumbrial, was built high up on the ledge of a hill and so presented a fine prospect of the country round Sopor and the valley of the Pohru. The inevitable ten-mile climb up a neighbouring hill I took the following day and, as expected, had another fine view of the snowy ranges all round me. Prominent among these were the Kajinag and Bungus groups. The former, when I went for a stroll that evening, made a magnificent sight, standing as it did in bold relief against a sky aglow with the pure liquid pink of the sun that had already set. But for this wonderful sight there was nothing noteworthy except that I saw a pair of Himalayan lyre-birds striped all over in black and white and giving out a series of peculiar shrill notes

as they flew from branch to branch of the pines that clustered up the hill-side. Guide-books had prepared me to see birds of all kinds and flowers of every description in the forest-glades and park-like meadows of the Lolab Valley. But for an occasional cluster of violets and forget-me-nots, and a few nondescript varieties of flowers here and there and a fleeting sight of a bird now and again, I saw nothing remarkable in either bird or plant life.

However, that day, it seems, was not to depart without yielding me one of the purest of joys and liveliest of nights of the many I had spent in that lonely valley. Perhaps the reader's curiosity would be for a moment excited by the last sentence and his imagination set working in many directions, good and — shall I say? — not-good, but he would never be able to guess the simple cause of that pure joy and lively night. So I had better tell him without any longer wearying his patience or taxing his imagination. I received that evening on my return home my *dâk* of twenty-five letters and fifteen newspapers. What those letters and newspapers meant to me that night only those will realise who have like myself been lonely travellers in the heart of a Himalayan jungle several days' journey from the nearest town, where there was not a civilised face to be seen within a hundred miles of it nor a scrap of news to be had for weeks on end. Long I sat up that night by my hurricane lamp perusing newspapers and reading over and over again good news

from home and happy messages from dear hearts in old England and away in distant California.

But late hours that night did not mean longer time in bed the following morning. For punctually at five the *reveillé* was blown on my camp-whistle and the next moment the whole camp was awake to commence the toils of the day. And well it was that we started early. For contrary to expectations a long and weary march awaited us that day. We were bound for Rainawari, which the guide-books said was about twelve miles away and meant the crossing of the Pohru on the way. We were told that a ferry-boat would carry us across, so when we came to the river and could see no sign of the promised boat, I inquired of the guide as to its whereabouts. He replied the boat was lying tied up under a tree and, as it was still early, the ferry-man was asleep in his cottage; and then quietly sat down himself to await his arrival. I questioned him what he meant by sitting down: didn't he know what he had to do in the matter: and told him to go straight off to the man's cottage and wake him up and not to return till he had secured the man and the boat. He left immediately, and when at length after an hour he made his appearance again, he was by himself. On being asked why he had returned without the ferry-man and his boat, he replied, "The boat, *Sahib*, has sprung a leak and it will take some time to get it repaired." "How long?" I inquired. "It will not take long. When *dhup* (the sunlight) goes up, it will be

ready," answered the guide. "Do you want us to wait here till noon?" I asked, amazed; "I won't wait! The man and the boat must be here in half-an-hour"; and then warned him that if he failed again to carry out my orders, he and his sleeping friend would get a taste of my walking-stick. That was impossible, he rejoined, but if the *Sahib* wished he could take him to another ferry-boat two miles away, by which with the *Sahib's ikbal* he would assuredly cross the stream.

That meant we had to do extra four miles before we could rejoin the track that stood staring us on the opposite bank. But unwelcome as was the prospect of walking four miles all to no purpose, it was certainly better than to be set kicking one's heels for four hours and then at the end to be put to the necessity of crossing a racing river in a leaky boat hastily patched up. So off we went, ponies and all, to the distant ferry-station, crossed the river, retraced our steps on the opposite bank, ascended a thousand-foot hill and, after some hours of trudging along open ploughed-up fields and through dense forests of pine, reached our destination about tea-time. Finding the forest bungalow in the hollow of a hill, I had my tent pitched on an eminence with the soaring snow-white height of Kajinag facing us and aglow for the moment with the last rays of the setting sun.

I wanted and longed to ascend that snow-covered height of Kajinag that I watched each

morning and evening for the last few days, but no inducement could tempt my guide to lead me up it at that time of the year. So it had to be abandoned. But with its sister height of Bungus I was more fortunate. It was brought about in this wise. Desiring once again to have a quiet day amidst the simpler scenes of nature, I side-tracked from the main valley into the little ravine of the Wadhr. Finding a beautifully-designed forest-hut underneath a clump of firs above the village of the same name, I stopped there for the day. And happening to converse with the *chowkidar* of the hut, I discovered in him the very man I was in search of to take me up Bungus. He was, he said, quite willing to lead me up, but the heights round Bungus, being still in the grip of winter, were frequented with *balus* and *shers* (bears and leopards): consequently he would not take upon himself the risk of conducting the *Sahib* up Bungus, unless a *shikari* with a rifle was included in the party. Having known by then that the Kashmiris were a timid race of people and apt to be frightened by imaginary dangers, I made light of the fears of the *chowkidar* and only yielded so far to them as to consent to have an extra man besides my *khitmadgar* to meet an emergency should one crop up.

The following morning while it was still dark we four left the hut for Bungus, each of us having provided himself with a strong, spiked *tulum*.[1]

[1] Alpenstock.

The first part of the ascent, though steep, we took with comparative ease, and in little over an hour we were on the top of the ridge. After that the track followed the irregular summit of the ridge, now going up a hundred feet, then taking a deep plunge down, only to find at the end of it another little ascent of a few hundred feet staring us in the face. This continuous going up and down little ascents resulted in slow progress and would have meant tedious going besides, were it not that Kajinag bore us company all the way and cheered us at each halting-place with an unimpeded view of its wonderfully white, spotless height. The path later on took a sharp curve and with it our once faithful companion suddenly deserted us. We thought its sudden desertion all the more cruel, for the trail had now got fainter and fainter, and as it was covered with large patches of heavy snow we had to have all our wits about us to pick it up again and again after losing it every few minutes. Shortly after, the track gave up all pretence of showing itself even occasionally, and a little later, from the faint rumbling sound of running water underneath our feet, we made out that we were walking on a frozen *nallah* or stream. It was a bright, sunny day and so the glare on that long strip of frozen stream after a while became unbearable and I had to keep my eyes almost closed to avoid the glare from blinding me for the time being. My feet were shod with Kashmiri grass-shoes with socks of thick felt, split at the toe; and so except

for the glare I felt quite comfortable tramping that two-mile strip of hard frozen snow before reaching Bungus. When at length at noon I reached it, I found it to be a rather elongated dish-shaped plateau covered from end to end with snow. There selecting a spot, high and dry, I sat down to contemplate the scene around me and more particularly to see what my *tiffin-tokri* contained.

The scene around me was so wonderfully bright that it looked like a veritable fairyland. Still, for the greater part of the hour I was seated there my attention was not taken up by that fairy-scene around me but by a little patch of snow in front of me not quite five feet square, wholly covered with pink primulas dyed in the freshest and the rosiest of heavenly hue. On my way back I questioned myself why it was that that little patch absorbed all my immediate attention while the magnificent panorama all around me left me as unimpressed as apathetic. The only way I can account for it is that man is a strangely variable creature, and to allow him to possess and enjoy the utmost the earth can give is the surest way to cast him into a state of apathy and lassitude. The senses appear to lose their normal resilience and become less susceptible to outward impressions, the imagination is temporarily paralysed by the abundance, and a kind of dazed listlessness seems to settle over the mind. A revulsion of feeling soon succeeds and the mind instinctively sighs for the opposite of what has fatigued it, with the

necessary consequence that it fastens on something that is quite simple and elementary and has a quiet beauty all its own which could be readily apprehended and instantly enjoyed.

From Wadhr the following day we marched to Kitardaji and there encamped on an eminence overlooking the valley of the Talri River. Fatigued by the long day's march I was having a cup of refreshing hot tea, reclining on a canvas chair at peace with myself and all the world around me, when all unexpectedly I heard shouts and groans, and on turning my head in the direction from which they came I found my *khitmadgar* roughly pushing with one hand a rather elderly looking man with grey beard and ruthlessly smacking his face with the other. On seeing them I shouted out to the *khitmadgar* instantly to stay his hand, and when he approached me I demanded of him an explanation as to what he meant by using an old man so brutally. He replied that the man was the *lumbardar* of the place and refused to supply him with milk, eggs, and chicken, which he was bound to do and of which we were badly in need. The man, thereupon, remonstrated that he was not the *lumbardar* of Kitardaji, who was just then away to a distant village to see the *naib-tehsildar* of the district. I had before then heard of "the *lumbardar* being away to see the *naib-tehsildar*"; I consequently told him that that excuse won't help him far, and unless he did something to meet our urgent needs, I would not interfere a second

time with my man carrying out his duty according to his own ideas. The threat had a magical effect, for within half-an-hour all our requirements were not only brought in but I found the old rogue pulling long puffs at the hubble-bubble of my men and chatting familiarly with them as if nothing had happened and they had been friends all their lives.

I was not quite taken aback by that sight, for by then I was fairly well initiated into these puzzling traits of the Kashmiri character. But for the Western reader it would be rather difficult to understand the working of the Kashmiri mind in these directions. Moreover, if he is an upholder of the "man and brother" theory, he would actually take me to task for not having the common humanity to mete out condign punishment to my man for beating an old man in the cruel way he did. If the reader did anything of the kind, I would applaud his intention and fully support his argument for the simple reason that I am a believer in the *droits de l'homme* myself and in nothing do I detest the average Anglo-Indian so much as in his habit of riding roughshod over those classes of Indians who are incapable of resenting his ill-mannered ways. But I contend that when one has to deal with people of so perverse a nature and of so low an organisation as the Kashmiris, whose minds are apt to be left unimpressed by mere words unless they are backed by physical argument, a little timely coaxing of this description could do them

no more harm than an occasional judicious whacking to obstinate, self-willed children. "No Kashmiri without impulsion of *force majeure*," rightly remarks Major Swinburne in his fine book on Kashmir,[1] "would ever do any work —no logical argument will enable him to see ultimate good in immediate irksomeness." Ordinarily I was spared this ugly part of the business, for I carried a *parwana* from the Governor of Srinagar which among other things commanded all the village officials to supply me with my requirements "on pain of being flayed alive"; and this magic parchment made many a wily *lumbardar* and recalcitrant *zahaldar* change their mind and mood on a mere sight of it.

My troubles that evening, it seemed, were not to end with the happy settlement of the old *lumbardar's* differences with us, for the *khitmadgar* came and reported that as one of the lamps was broken on the march that day, another gone out of order and the candles of the third were exhausted, the *huzoor* would have to go without a light that night. It was a dark, overclouded, moonless night; consequently the prospect of passing a whole night without a light in a pine-forest reputed to be infested with bears and leopards was not exactly cheering. But there was a simple way out of the difficulty—at any rate for the first part of the night, and that was to light a camp-fire. The three pony-men were, in consequence, despatched to collect fire-wood and

[1] *A Holiday in the Happy Valley*, ch. x.

returned before long dragging behind them with the aid of some villagers huge pine-trunks with which was set going a big roaring fire, in the waving, uncertain light of which I had my dinner, wrote my letters, looked up my maps, and read the guide-books for the following day's march to Bosian, up Baramulla.

As the guide-books had indicated, the bridle-path to Bosian rambled erratically over hills and down dales, and so it proved tediously long, and the last part of it was so steep that it looked as if no pack-ponies could possibly go up its incline with their loads on them. As expected, the pony-men whined and grumbled and at last protested that as their ponies were tired out by the long day's march " their lives would come out of them " if they were forcibly dragged up that steep three-miles' zig-zag to Bosian. A glance at the condition of the ponies made it all too evident to me that there was not much exaggeration in what they said, and that to make the poor dumb creatures go up that height at the fag-end of their march would be cruel, if not impossible. But as we were in the heart of a forest with no camping-ground and no supply of water, there was no way round the difficulty but over it, and so peremptory orders were passed that the march was to be continued immediately. The pony-men kept staring at each other and none of them appeared to make any effort to move. In emergencies like these, when things seem to come to an *impasse*, Raheema my

khitmadgar always stepped up and took the lead. So here again he got hold of the reins of the leading-pony and just went ahead without once looking back to see whether the rest were following him or not. Seeing his example the rest of my men and *makarwans* took heart and one by one followed in his trail like so many sheep. Of course, it wasn't all plain sailing nor a mere question of leading! For before we had gone very far up the zig-zag we came across such stiff, steep bits that the ponies had literally to be pushed from behind up ugly corners, rounding which the lighter baggage again and again went toppling over and down the mountain-side until some chance boulder or rock stayed its wild career downwards. At last at sunset time we managed to reach the top and made for the forest bungalow through a widely-extending marg or meadowland. The marg with its lush-grass provided a splendid grazing-ground and the *gujjars* had, in consequence, already encamped there, forming with their sheep and cattle little colonies round it. But the sight that made me pause and watch with bated breath was a team of wild mountain-ponies which, taking fright at our unexpected approach, broke immediately into a terrific gallop and then, racing madly across the open marg, disappeared eventually behind a clump of pines at the far end of it.

High as Bosian stood, there were mountain-peaks higher still in its neighbourhood. The highest of these I was told commanded a splendid

view, and so I found it did, when the morning following after three hours of steady ascent I reached the top and saw the Valley of Baramulla lying thousands of feet below me intersected by the glistening course of the hurrying Jhelum, and the Pindi highway running along it, and guarded closely on either side by the snowy heights of the Kajinag and the Pir Panjal. I found on my return a large bundle of letters and newspapers awaiting me. Welcome as was the sight of that precious bundle to me, there was another beside it that made me almost jump for joy. And that other bundle contained—the reader will scarcely believe me when I say—two loaves of plain bread which the *khitmadgar* had brought up with him along with the mails from Baramulla. I instantly tore open the bundle, greedily grabbed at one of the loaves, impatiently cut it up and ravenously ate whole slices of it. And, oh, it was so soft, and so sweet and " delicate to eat " like a cake. One has to live on a strict ration of hard, stale bread for some three weeks continuously to know what a precious thing that common necessity of civilised existence is, and why Christ should have alluded to it alone in the Lord's Prayer and made it out to be the symbol of all the many things we need each day of our life here below.

Bosian was our last halting-place in the Lolab Valley, and the morning following we went down to Baramulla to proceed up to Gulmarg. Judging from its name and the wonderful descriptions I had read of it, I thought that that far-famed " Meadow

of Roses" would be ideally suited for my present purpose, inasmuch as the growing strain and long fatigue of our three weeks' continuous marching would assuredly be charmed away by idling away a few days amid its balmy airs and beautiful surroundings. Imagine, therefore, my surprise when the following day I walked up the thickly wooded glen of Nambalnar and stood on the top of the gap leading down to the renowned **marg**! Instead of a meadow of roses spreading out before me, I found myself standing on the top of a gigantic sunken lawn enclosed by a broad band of pines and firs, under the sombre shade of which lay ensconced a cluster of wooden huts, and above which rose for sheer three thousand feet and more the towering height of Apharwat with the mantle of wintry snow still covering it from end to end. So cold and benumbing it all looked and felt that I had to put away for the nonce the fair dreams with which I had started out from Baramulla of idling away a week amidst its fields of roses and groves of pines, and to take immediately to a more strenuous form of existence to keep myself at least warm and tolerably comfortable amidst my cheerless surroundings. After viewing a dozen sites, one presenting a splendid view of the triple snow-peaks of Hingal, Zamir and Apharwat was at last selected and rented for the season, and before long the tent was pitched thereon. And well it was that we had some shelter over our heads, for there was a heavy downpour soon after which made the marg sopping wet all

around. But strangely enough a few minutes later the sun came out in all his vigour and it was again clear and bright and almost dry. That spell of brightness was of short duration, for it turned out to be the unwelcome herald of a heavy shower which in itself proved in the end to be the happy precursor of yet another spell of bright, clear weather. And so the weather kept all that afternoon, alternately becoming fine and wet, changing its mood quite half a dozen times in the space of an hour.

With such a very changeable weather, staying up at Gulmarg for any length of time did not present a particularly bright prospect, but when Raheema incidentally remarked that that kind of weather was typical of Gulmarg, I had half made up my mind to leave the amphibian charms of the Meadow of Roses to such as cared for them and go down to Srinagar at the first convenient moment the following morning. Contrary to expectations that morning broke exceptionally fine, and so it kept not only for the whole length of that day but almost continuously for the next six days I was up at Gulmarg. Taking advantage of that bright spell of weather I planned an excursion for every alternate day, and so the greater part of the first day was devoted to going to Ningal and climbing up Somli Ali, the top of which spread before one a splendid panoramic view of the neighbouring snow-clad heights. For a change, on my next excursion, I walked down to Ferozepore Nallah and spent the

day loitering beside its banks, and towards evening returned to camp by a snow-bridge over a rather precarious mountain-path. The last excursion lay along the craggy ascent of Killanmarg and then up the dizzy height of Apharwat. When I reached the top of Killanmarg and told the guide to lead me up Apharwat, which was then wholly covered with snow, he turned round and looked at me in such a way so to convey to me: "How could the *Sahib* think of going up a trackless snowy height!" On my repeating the order, he blurted out, "No *Sahib* has gone up Apharwat this season, because there is no way of going up that height at present." "In that case," I replied, "we shall make a way for ourselves and take the credit of being the first to go up Apharwat this season." Seeing him hesitate, as if doubting my ability to act up to my words, I went on to say that if he was afraid to go up, I would not force him to accompany me, but I would go up all the same. The last words had the desired effect. He shook off the momentary fear that had seized him, and after that he faithfully followed me all the way up to the summit, where a vast field of soft snow eventually put a stop to all further progress, and on my return helped me to gather a species of everlastings, growing in patches at the foot of Apharwat, the deep gold tint of which gave the cold, cheerless scene around just that touch of warmth and colour which one felt it so imperatively needed.

The Circular Road for which Gulmarg is so

famous drew me up from my camp every evening and each free morning, particularly that strip of it down by the Residency, covered all over with violets and edelweiss and hundred other nameless flowers, and overlooking the ever-fascinating Ferozepore Nallah with the twin peaks of Chagas and Lamir rising abruptly above it and the Forest of Riyar stretching in one magnificent sweep down into the valley of the Jhelum in the far distance.

Gulmarg, as is well known, is a great Anglo-Indian mountain-retreat to which everybody who is anybody in that little fraternity which congregates each year in Kashmir retires at the first touch of summer and does not return till the autumn has well set in. Wherever Anglo-Indians congregate, they needs must have their club with its attendant tenements of tennis-courts and golf links; so also at Gulmarg they have their club with its necessary *appanage* which forms quite a central feature of the extended marg. In fact, the whole marg or the best part of it presents an appearance as if it were the private property of the Club. For go where one may on the open marg there are either notices put up to remind the ordinary visitor or golf-links to indicate to him that he is walking on ground to which strictly speaking the members of the Club only have a right of access. And as membership is almost exclusively confined to the Anglo-Indians, it comes to this, that except for the five-feet central road no Kashmiri or for the matter of that no Indian whatever could venture out on

the open marg without risking the possibility of being warned off it by any petty club-attendant he happened to stumble across. Almost within stone's throw of my camping-ground there was one such obtruding notice-board, which every time I left my camp or returned to it silently reminded me that it was only on sufferance I was allowed to cross the marg. If one's movements were so fettered in a foreign land, one could not complain against the obtruding regulations and must either consent to abide by them or leave the land. But to find rank outsiders allowing one to move about in any part of one's own country on sufferance is a bitterly humiliating fact and one that cannot and will not for long be endured by any people who have a grain of self-respect or a spark of patriotism left in them. Kashmir, it must be remembered, is above all and beyond compare an ideal holiday-maker's country. It is the one country in the world where no hideous boards saying "Private Ground. Trespassers will be prosecuted" come to bar the wayfarer's track or mar his pleasures. Kashmir, moreover, being a semi-independent Native State and the Maharaja being in law the sole owner and proprietor of all lands in the *raj*, every visitor to it is looked upon as a kind of guest of the Maharaja and is perfectly free to go where he likes and enjoy what he fancies, and no one can dare say nay to him. He can moor his house-boat to any spot he chooses on the river and on the lakes, and pitch his tent wherever it

takes his fancy, whether in the open plains or up in the wooded wilds. It is this utterly free and unfettered mode of existence to which Kashmir so readily and so perfectly lends itself that singles it out as the ideal holiday-ground for those who wish to run away for a while from the grinding routine of daily occupation and petty trammels of social life. True it is that the English officials of the Durbar have introduced into the State game laws modelled on those of England, and state-*rukhs* or game-preserves have been set up: but they are so few and far between and so out of the beaten track that the ordinary holiday-maker, unless he is out on a *shikar*, need never know of their existence even. I, in all my thousand miles' tramp, bumped against them barely half-a-dozen times. Consequently, galling and intolerable as are the exclusive ways of the Anglo-Indians in India itself, they come with singular ill-grace in a land like Kashmir with its liberal traditions and idealistic charms. They forget that they are up against the whole spirit of the place! Anyhow at Gulmarg I was so sharply and so constantly brought in contact with these segregating ideals of the Anglo-Indians that though I had originally intended to stay there till I felt myself quite fit and ready for my next walking venture in the Sindh and Ledar Valleys, I gave orders one morning early in June to strike camp and walked down to Tangmarg and took a *tonga* thence for Srinagar and was back in the city and in my boat that same evening.

BACK TO SRINAGAR

"Srinagar has been called the 'Venice of the East.' Both cities are 'smelly' and waterways in either form the main thoroughfares,—*shikaras*, the Kashmiri canoes, being first-cousins to gondolas."—SWINBURNE.

CHAPTER IV

BACK TO SRINAGAR

On a rough calculation I found the continuous marches and the various excursions for the day at Gulmarg and at each of the many halting-places in the Lolab had yielded me in all about three hundred and fifty miles and some forty thousand feet of mountain-climbing. The next item on my programme was a circular tour of the Sindh and Ledar Valleys interspersed with a short excursion into Tibet over the Zoji Pass and branching off towards the end into the Wangat Valley to go up to the sacred mountain-lake of Gangabal to attempt an ascent up the first ledge or two of hoary Haramouk. This meant a tramp of two hundred and fifty miles, and doing it in decent haste would take up, I calculated, quite four weeks. Starting immediately was, therefore, out of the question. The rough and tumble of the long marches had told seriously on our tents and camp-equipment. Many items of the latter needed immediate repairs, many more being broken beyond repairs required replacing, and the tents which looked so clean and white at the start had gone quite shabby and were torn so badly in places that

their complete overhauling was made imperative before they could be used again. A couple of days ought to have sufficed to do these repairs and take in the provisions for the contemplated tour, but I knew that, in sleepy Kashmir, to get all these things ready even a week would be all too insufficient; and so indeed it proved to be in the end as the sequel will presently attest.

But a week in Srinagar need at no time hang on one, and the week I was there, recouping and refitting, did certainly not hang on me. It gave me on the contrary a splendid opportunity to attend to my much-neglected social duties. I revisited the many new acquaintances I had made in Srinagar and called on the few old friends that had arrived in the city while I was away. Not an evening passed but I dined with them or they with me. In their company all the old familiar haunts of mine on the river and the lake were revisited and re-enjoyed with all the freshness of a first visit. During the few short weeks I was away things had advanced wonderfully. A new set of flowers met one's eyes wherever one turned them, and the first fruits of the season were already being ferried across in the little fruit-boats. Every morning by the side-window of the *Constance* came my fruitman in his *shikara* laden with the rich spoil of his garden in the shape of cherries and strawberries arranged in little toy-baskets or spread out in big *dalis*,—but however arranged they looked too tempting for any prolonged resistance on my

part, and so with the help of a little whipped cream I fell a ready victim to their luscious charms. But the coquetry of the fruits was simplicity itself besides that of the flowers. Each morning without fail these last drew me out of my warm, comfortable bed at the unseasonable hour of nine to bear them company on the Bund. Each time as I stepped out of my boat, I bemoaned my weakness in so readily yielding to their importunate wishes, but once I had passed the Residency and the Club and entered the European Quarter proper, all my regrets vanished on the instant and I was once again an easy and a willing prey to their silent blandishments. For there spread before me a veritable Feast of Flowers, with roses of all kinds and every tint filling the air with the blended perfume of a thousand scents. In such profusion did the roses bloom in the gardens and in such wild abundance did they run up the houses and trail down the wooden palings by the Bund-side that one might without drawing upon one's imagination say in all sober truth and reality that the Bund down to the Sonawar Bagh, was—" Roses, roses all the way."

If Srinagar displayed such charms under " the gaudy light of day," what allurements the Jhelum flowing by it must have possessed at night under the pale, silvery beams of the moon, I leave the reader to imagine for himself. I remember one moonlight night in particular when I had a young couple, who were spending

their honeymoon in Kashmir, to dine with me. I had arranged for a little surprise *shikara*-ride up the river after dinner. So when the dinner was over and we had sipped our coffee and lit our cigarettes, we came out of the *Constance* and idly strolled on the embankment underneath the aisle of the poplars on the other side of the river. Strolling thus we came upon a break in the aisle, when the Bride, touched by the beauty of the scene around her, broke out in an exclamation: "Oh, wouldn't I love to have a *shikara*-ride in this lovely moonlight!" No sooner had the words fallen from her lips than I gave the pre-arranged signal and my *shikara*, which was closely following us in the dark, shot out in the open and lay waiting in full moonlight with a bright Kashmiri *namdah* spread inside it and soft cushions resting against the sides. The Bride was overjoyed at the bare idea of her wish being thus, so to say, magically realised, and so ran down the embankment and lightly stepped into the *shikara*, and we followed closely at her heels, and the moment we lay comfortably stretched out on the cushions the *shikara* was pushed off the bank and was being slowly paddled up the stream. On and on we went till we had rounded the bend of the Sonawar Bagh and were well up the open river. The mountains being veiled in a luminous haze looked so big and ghostly besides the placid moon-lit waters that the whole scene made really a weird, a most awe-inspiring sight. But it was when we turned

round and took in the *chapas* and let the boat glide down with the stream, that Kashmir of a sudden changed its entire aspect and flashed on us in all its traditional transcendental charm and beauty as it does in the pages of Moore and Bernier. So lightly did the *shikara* rest on the glistening waters and so imperceptibly did it move down with them that we seemed to be on a dream-boat carried along on the impulse of some mysterious force still unknown to Science. There we lay buried in our pile of cushions, not daring to stir a limb or breathe a word, so entranced we were by the unearthly beauty of all things around us. Even my men, habitually so garrulous and restless, sat for once stock-still and silent, evidently overpowered by the magic influence of the scene around. Not a sound was heard nor a movement noticed anywhere except in the long, tremulous, many-coloured reflections cast by the fantastically-lit house-boats, between two rows of which we were being gently wafted along. Verily, verily the whole scene seemed too beautiful to be true, too fairyland-like to be real, and as if in response to that feeling of mine there came across the bourne of Time that grand old couplet of Imperial Shelim:

" Agar Fardaus bar rué zamin ast,
Hamin ast wa Hamin ast wa Hamin ast! " [1]

Next morning when I woke up and looked around, that dreamland of yester-night had passed

[1] **" If on earth, there's a heaven of bliss,**
It is here, it is here, it is here! "

away indeed like a dream, and Kashmir by contrast looked commonplace and almost tawdry in the glare of the risen sun. And scarcely had I dressed and moved out when I was brought into immediate contact with all the stern necessities and sordid realities of daily existence. We had been by then full eight days in Srinagar getting ready our tents and camp-kit for our next walking-tour, and after repeated postponements I had at last fixed upon that morning to leave the city. But with the proverbial dilatoriness of the East and its habit of putting off till to-morrow what should be done to-day, the morning of our starting-day found us still unprepared and the *khitmadgar* was all in a flurry about the half-a-dozen things that had been sent out for repairs and had not yet come in and would in all probability have not come in for another eight days, had I not immediately taken the matter in hand and invoked the thunders of the all-mighty Motamid-Durbar [1] on the offending heads. The

[1] I make the following highly interesting extract about the functions and powers of this great State-Official from the useful little guide-book of my esteemed friend the present Motamid-Durbar, Rai Saheb Pandit Man Mohan Lal Langar, B.A., LL.B.:

"The Maharaja's Indian Officer known as 'Motamid Durbar' is the proper person to be communicated with for all general information. He is always an English speaking and obliging civil officer. He will afford help of every kind and give any information in his power. His office and residence is at the end of the Chinar Bagh towards Amira Kadal, close to Messrs. Dhanjibhoy's Tonga Stand. He makes arrangements for the hire of boatmen, coolies, all sorts of servants, etc., and settles any dispute that may arise as regards the fare and overcharge of prices. He, being vested with summary powers to inflict a fine or whipping in

great Durbar was not invoked in vain, for the truant things sheepishly returned on board by noon, and a little later D.H.B. *Constance* left her moorings and proceeded rapidly down the stream on her long-deferred voyage to Gandarbal, the great port and harbour of the Sindh Valley.

cases of complaints against the subjects of H.H. the Maharaja Sahib of Kashmir, who are for the time in the service of European visitors or residents, exercises a very wholesome influence on the Kashmiri servants and boatmen. He is an authority on most points affecting the interests and comforts of visitors. In short when in doubt or difficulty, the Motamid Durbar should be consulted or referred to."

IN THE

SINDH AND LEDAR VALLEYS

" Let me rest by the roaring Sindh, or let me lie down by the
Ledar stream;
There would I sleep my sleep for ever, there would I dream
my long, long dream:
Out of their rocks' and rapids' riot and out of the murmur
of their water-fall,
Surely my spirit shall be soothed and quiet, surely my soul
shall have rest from it all.

" Wrapt all round with the scent of flowers, robed with the
green of the living grass,
There shall I bless the golden hours, there shall I awake all
sorrow pass:
Yea, as the flying clouds do scatter, yea, as the mists melt
far away,
This shall seem but a little matter, *this* that troubles me so
much to-day."

DUNN.

CHAPTER V

IN THE SINDH AND LEDAR VALLEYS

GANDARBAL was reached the next forenoon and the *Constance* was immediately moored under one of its famous chenars. There to my surprise and joy I found some old friends who before long introduced me to some new ones. Of these latter the memory of one in particular is still fresh and bright within me as of the evening I first met her. On my way to Gandarbal, I had been reading *Lalla Rookh*, and my mind was so taken up by the wonderful personality of that renowned princess and her melodious name came so constantly to my lips that, when I became a little more acquainted with this new friend of mine, I quite unconsciously called her "Lalla" and by that name I knew her all the many days we were together in Gandarbal and up in the Valley of the Sindh. Originally I intended staying for a day at Gandarbal before starting on my walking-tour in the Sindh Valley, but the introduction of this unexpected item into my set programme modified it to such an extent that I found myself spending a week instead of a day at that famous Kashmiri summer-resort. Each morning our mixed party of some eight souls

all told formed a regular cavalcade and rode out to different places of interest in the neighbourhood. Our mounts were the tiny Kashmiri ponies which looked so gaunt and over-worked, and yet with a little management and steady urging it was surprising what long rides and breezy gallops we could get out of them. I have cause to remember in particular the ride we had going to Manasbal, owing to a practical lesson in dynamics I had occasion to learn. It happened in this wise. One of the minor features of Kashmir is the mulberry-tree, and as it was just then its fruiting season, the trees were covered with the luscious berries. Lalla was almost greedily fond of them and insisted on having a bunch whenever it happened to be within her or her companion's reach. On this particular ride, she happened to spy a rather tempting bunch over an elevated portion of land between which and the road there was a channel of running water. Lalla remarked that I would not be able to get it for her, with the result that I rode across the channel and up the elevated ground, and as the particular bunch was quite beyond my reach I tried to secure it by pulling with the hooked handle of my riding-whip the branch on which it hung. As the several attempts I made to secure it proved unavailing, Lalla grew impatient and asked me to come away, and at the same time whipped her own pony and rode away herself. But her companion, however, was not to be so easily put away from his purpose; and so after

several more futile attempts a lucky pull secured him the prize. In the eagerness of seizing the prize-bunch several berries were squashed, but there were enough good ones left to satisfy the needs of even such a voracious little human grub as I saw riding some distance away from me. As I in high feather was riding down the mound with berries lightly held in one hand and the reins and whip in the other, a stray forked branch of the mulberry caught me on the side of the neck, and before I could pull up the pony, it took a jump into the water with the consequence that I went clean over the saddle and down the mound into the channel of water. Lalla happening to look round and seeing my plight rushed to help me, but before she quite approached me I was up on my feet and was next moment on my pony, none the worse for the little shaking and ducking I had except that my khaki clothes were splashed all over with mud and dirt. But my berries were lost in the water, and that was the one and only point in the whole incident that I never ceased regretting all the way up to Manasbal.

In what contrast does Manasbal appear when seen from its Gandarbal approach to the sight it presents when viewed from the Sumbul side! Where was the loveliness of which Mrs. Villiers Stuart spoke, where now the jewel-like brilliancy of which Younghusband wrote? From this approach even a brilliant array of clouds would have made it look comparatively tame, but on that bright, cloudless day it appeared positively

commonplace—a mere patch of dull, passionless water. I almost regretted having seen it once again and ruined the beautiful picture I was carrying of it in the front recesses of my memory. But did I really regret? Why should I? Was not Lalla with me? And was not the sorcery of her bare presence enough to lend enchantment to the tamest and dullest scene in all Kashmir? Lalla, contrary to her great namesake, was really *petite*, yet somehow even in her ordinary clothes she always managed to convey an impression of delicious femininity. But that day in her men's breeches and khaki puttees she looked an adorable little rogue, with her bobbed hair flopping rhythmically and not less mischievously as she moved about with her hands buried deep in her breeches-pockets. Her pranks were always a source of endless amusement to me, but there was a serious side to her character and she often became pensive, and then it was that she interested me most. That morning she was in her sportive mood, but as the day wore on her spirits seemed to flag and presently she asked me to read to her the story of her namesake as I had long promised to do. So in the afternoon, as the rest of the party lay stretched on mats having their *siesta*, we two moved away to a quiet spot under a spreading chenar overlooking the lake, and there seated side by side I read to her the introductory story of Lalla Rookh's progress from the Imperial Capital to the far-famed Valley where we were. Lalla's face now lighted up with joy and then

dimmed with sadness, alternating with the varying fortunes of her namesake, till I came to the happy *dénouement* at the end, when she jumped up clapping her hands and went on clapping so incontinently in the wild glee of her little heart that the good people who lay snoring on mats some distance away from us, woke up with a start and inquired if anything had gone wrong and if we needed their help. And that only gave occasion for a fresh display of Lalla's mirth which was

> " Full of life, without any control,
> But the sweet one of gracefulness, rung from her soul;
> And where it most sparkled no glance could discover,
> In lip, cheek, or eyes, for she brighten'd all over,—
> Like any fair lake that the breeze is upon,
> When it breaks into dimples and laughs in the sun."

That night we were busy packing up our things, for we had arranged to start together on our tour of the Sindh Valley the following morning. Accordingly at daybreak after much shouting and free use of fists, as is the custom in the East, our men at last got the long cavalcade of some twenty baggage-ponies and coolies started on the first stage of the tour. For once I broke my long tramping record and got on a pony to keep Lalla company and to have those long spells of breezy canter to which she and I by then had got so used. But there was another reason besides. I had been reading Miss Marion Doughty's well-known work[1] on Kashmir in

[1] *Afoot through the Kashmir Valleys.*

which she spoke of having passed through "a world of roses" of amazing richness, colour and perfume while taking this particular march.[1] My imagination was naturally kindled by the glowing description, and as I was in the valley the same month as Miss Doughty was, I was keenly anxious that Lalla and I should go through this wonderful God's own Garden of Roses together, and together breathe the wonderful air laden with the perfume of a million roses. So when we came to the fine suspension bridge over the Sindh, we could scarcely hold ourselves in patience and Lalla panted quite audibly for what awaited us on the other side of the river. Imagine, therefore, our surprise and disappointment when after crossing the bridge and riding mile after mile in search of the promised garden of roses, we made the not quite pleasant discovery that that garden had existence only in the prolific imagination of Miss Doughty, and for us poor, unimaginative creatures there was nothing but

[1] "Some six miles beyond Gandarbal, the road crossed the Sind, here a wide-spreading brawling mountain torrent, the whole valley widened, the mountains standing back on either side. It was a 'world of roses.' Maybe people at home think they know what this means. I am sorry for them; they are mistaken. I have seen wild and garden roses in many places, as I thought, in vast quantities, but a land clothed in roses I did not know. They were in millions, the mingling of hues—white, blush pink, deepest blood red—producing a mosaic of colour amazing in richness, in variety. The grey rocks were hidden under the clinging bushes, the air was full of their perfume, they were as much the universal garb of the earth as grass and daisies in less-favoured regions. Impossible to hurry, it was difficult to keep to a progressive pace, when every instant the eye was arrested by some fresh object of interest."—*Afoot through the Kashmir Valleys*, p. 80.

flat lands and stony rocks with nondescript plants and flowers to see and get over our disappointment as best we could.

This phantom "world of roses" of Miss Doughty incidentally puts me in mind of the common weakness of most recent writers on Kashmir. The Land of Lalla Rookh being traditionally handed down as a land of poetry and romance, they think it incumbent on them to represent her as such in their works by writing her up in a vein of well-meant exaggeration or presenting pictures of her painted in glowing colours. But so patent is the beauty, so unquestionable the charms of Fair Kashmir that she needs no writing up nor glowing pictures to bring the world to her feet, but just keen perception of her native charms and honest description of her unadorned beauty.

However, to take up the thread of our story, our party of eight reached Kangan that afternoon without any misadventure and occupied the *dâk* bungalow there, and the morning following we started out again for the next stage, the whole cavalcade turning out as the day before except that I took to my tramping again, having given up my pony to one of our men who had gone quite foot-sore from the previous day's long march. Before reaching Goond that afternoon it became very wet, and tramping in that wretched weather would have been anything but pleasant were it not for my fair companion, who regardless of rain faithfully rode beside me and whose

bright, merry spirits even the torrential rains we were then experiencing seemed not to damp. Though we had our oil-silk all the time on us, such phials of his wrath had Jupiter Pluvius poured on us that when about tea-time we reached our destination, we were both drenched to the skin. Fortunately, however, I had sent my *khitmadgar* ahead of us with the tents that morning, and so to our great joy and relief we found the tents pitched and ready, and they not only gave us the sorely-needed protection but made it possible for us to get into drier clothes immediately.

The day following, the weather had not yet got over its ill-humour, and as our tents and wearing things had all gone soaking wet, all that we could do was to put off for the day our march to Sonamarg. Though the delay of each day meant that the dangerous crossing which I had planned to effect from Baltal to Amarnath Cave over a series of snow bridges would be made not only more dangerous but actually impossible should even one of the series of bridges crack and go down in the meanwhile, yet at heart I never for a single moment regretted this delay, for the simple reason that I would thereby have the sweet company of Lalla for a whole day more.

The Sindh near Goond, swollen by recent rains, became a brawling mountain torrent which rushed past the bend of our encampment at a terrific speed, leaping and tossing in a really

demented way and carrying great trees with it in its mad career downwards. It made a magnificent sight to watch and the little Bobbed-Hair was never so much in her element as when she was *vis-à-vis* with some wild, fearful sight of nature: and so, as soon as the rain had held off, down she ran to the river-bank, and selecting a rather high projecting rock by the side of which the rushing torrent dashed past in a fearful swirl, she stood contemplating the wild scene with her thick raven curls flying all wildly behind her. The sight made me uneasy for a moment and I shouted out to her to take care, but my voice was drowned in the hue and cry that was raised that instant in our camp behind me. Fearing something tragic had happened, I called out to Lalla to follow me and ran back myself to the scene of distress and found on reaching it two of my men supporting in their arms one of my pony-men who was apparently in a state of complete collapse. I asked my men what had gone wrong with the youth they were supporting. "Nothing, *huzoor*," replied the *khitmadgar*. "Then, why are you supporting him?" I inquired, puzzled. "One of his ponies is killed, having fallen down the mountain-side," answered Raheema. It seems the man had been out grazing his ponies along with his companions up on the mountain-side, when one of the ponies missed its foothold and went tumbling down into the ravine and was killed on the instant. The catastrophe was too sudden for the nerves

of its owner, and his two ponies being all the property he possessed in the world and the only source of income to him, he was naturally appalled at the immensity of his loss and collapsed on realising the hopelessness of ever making it good. The poor fellow cried like a child and beat his brow with his hands. Bobbed-Hair in the meantime had followed me and was now standing besides me listening with evident pain to the tale of woe as it fell from the *khitmadgar's* lips. At the end of it I remarked to Raheema that the man had to thank himself for his loss. Had he, I said, instead of sleeping away in some corner, looked after his ponies as the rest of his companions did, nothing would have happened; and then turning to my companion asked her if she did not think he was served right. To my surprise she shook her head and said she would help the unlucky youth to get back his pony. Hearing this one of the party remonstrated with her and argued that that would be like rewarding him for neglecting his obvious duty and setting at the same time a bad example to the rest. It came to this, I continued in support of his argument, that the men who were vigilant enough and never allowed their ponies to stray from them, got nothing for their vigilance, while a companion of theirs for his obvious carelessness was sympathised with and helped to escape the necessary consequences of his inexcusable negligence. But all our argument was thrown away on her, for she shook her bobbed hair more obstinately than

ever and remarked with a quiet determination that if none of us cared to help the unfortunate lad we were welcome to please ourselves, but nothing would make her change her mind to make good his loss herself. And the little woman had her way in the end, for somehow we all eventually came round to her way of thinking, and before parting each of us right willingly contributed his share of the fifty rupees demanded by her for her " unfortunate lad."

The following morning broke as dull and threatening as the day before, and the unwelcome prospect of having to pass another day at Goond appeared a dead certainty, when, lo, to our great surprise and joy the leaden clouds began slowly to shift and disperse, and soon after breakfast the shafts of sun-rays actually pierced their broken ranks and shed welcome warmth and light on the camping-ground and on the wild scene around. Orders were immediately given to strike camp, and an hour later the whole cavalcade was slowly wending its way towards Sonamarg. The character of the scenery was gradually changing as each day we progressed up the Sindh Valley. Pine-hung slopes and forests of firs came in view, and the Sindh itself grew narrower and more impetuous as it hurried down its attenuated course. However, right up to Gagangair which is half-way to Sonamarg from Goond, though the mountains looked more thickly-wooded and attained greater heights than before, there was yet nothing really grand or

awe-inspiring about the scenery as a whole. But once we left Gagangair behind, the whole aspect of nature around us changed with dramatic suddenness. The broad and extensive Valley of the Sindh seemed of a sudden to close in, the Sindh itself became a roaring torrent and

> " On every side now rose
> Rocks, which, in unimaginable forms,
> Lifted their black and barren pinnacles
> In the light of evening, and its precipice,
> Obscuring the ravine, disclosed above
> 'Mid toppling stones, black gulphs, and yawning caves
> Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues
> To the loud stream."

These lines of Shelley hummed in my ears as we progressed up the narrow mountain-gorge with snow-covered slopes and stupendous precipices on either side of it. At places these precipices rose sheer nine thousand feet from the gorge and towered above us in really awe-inspiring grandeur and majestic stateliness. And so they kept their grandeur and stateliness till we reached an opening where the valley once again broadened out into an extensive meadow with the Sindh encircling it and flowing as placidly as before. " This is Sonamarg, than which," remarks Dr. Arthur Neve, " a lovelier spot would be difficult to find." And so it was in a way a very lovely spot, particularly that elevated part of it overlooking the Valley of Glaciers, called Thajwas, where we camped. My party being not used to camping out, the fatigues of the long marches

The Snows of Sonamarg

told on its members, young and old; consequently, the whole of the following day they rested in camp, while I utilised it in going up a series of high hills, called the Middle Range. When after three hours' continuous ascent over vast tracks of snow and crumbling rocks I stood on the topmost peak of the highest hill, a fine unimpeded view of the rest of the Sindh Valley right up to Baltal with the Glacier Range standing high and impassable on one side of it lay open for my leisured survey. The Range, covered as it was from end to end with eternal snow, made such a wonderful sight on that bright sunny day with the mists flying about their tops that the afternoon had well advanced before I could bring myself to leave that giddy seat on the topmost peak and retrace my steps campwards.

The principal attraction of Sonamarg, however, is the famous Valley of Glaciers. I had long promised Lalla to take her out with me there when I went to investigate it for myself. The following morning, feeling quite fit and strong after the day's rest, she accompanied me on the excursion with another lady of the party. Three of us left betimes, and after crossing a frail, dangerous-looking pine-bridge over the rushing glacier-stream, we entered a pine-glade and a little later came right on the glistening paw of the first of the glaciers. That was Lalla's first acquaintance with snow. And it would have done one's heart good to see her uncontained joy and happy abandon at the first sight and feel

of snow. She verily danced on the patch we stood on, and in her wild glee made huge snow-balls, bit large chunks off them and hurled the rest at the two poor unoffending creatures in front of her. And she treated them so liberally and in such rapid succession that before long they looked more like ghosts than men. Her fun and frivolity abated not a bit all the two hours we were busy investigating the glaciers. Not a crevice did we pass but she instantly was on all fours peering down its blue translucent profundity, nor a snow-mound did we meet but she was up it before I could utter a word of warning to her. But her wild hilarity came to its paroxysm when we were up a steep snow-ledge some two to three hundred feet above the valley, and I suggested that we should have impromptu tobogganing down its giddy decline. The suggestion had hardly left my lips when both my companions took it up with alacrity. I requisitioned a thick waterproof we happened to have with us and spread it out on the snow and sat down with outstretched feet on one corner of it. I then pulled the corner up between my feet and held it firmly with both my hands while Lalla sat behind holding on to me by the waist, while her fair companion took her seat on the waterproof and, wrapping the left-over part of it round her waist, held on to Lalla in a like manner. We three thus formed a compact mass which I thought would go tumbling down the sharp declivity the moment I lifted my feet from the holes in which

they had been fixed. Full of expectations and after warning my companions, I cautiously lifted
8 my feet, but to their great surprise and mine, the firmly-riveted and waterproofed mass instead of rolling down the giddy declivity remained stuck where it was. I worked with my feet forward and so did my fair *collaboratrices* behind me, and I tugged at the corner of the waterproof I held in my hands with might and main to put in motion the breathing, palpitating mass of nearly four hundred pounds that lay ponderously on it. We did certainly move forward at every step, but strive as I would we could not make any headway. Again and again we attempted, but it seemed all to no purpose. I was so disappointed at our obvious inability to realise our simple wish, that I sat helpless on my little bit of waterproof not knowing what next to do. But Lalla was not so easily daunted at our apparent failure, and so taunted me for sitting there like one beaten when we should be making attempt after attempt till we succeeded. Another determined effort was made, in consequence, and yet another, but with no better result. Presently, however, I felt as if the snow on which I was seated was yielding to our pressure. But I thought that was only an impression of mine, when Lalla shouted out, "Hurrah! we are sliding,"—and sure enough we had slided down a little, and then a little more, till gaining momentum the compact mass that but a few moments before lay inert and lifeless began to move down

the declivity at such a speed as to make me involuntarily dig my feet deeper and deeper into the snow and Lalla to clutch me as if in terror. But all that excitement and thrilling experience of going down a snow-declivity at a breakneck speed was of short duration, for presently we came upon a tiny obstacle in the shape of a bit of chipped-off snow, and that, it seemed, was enough to check on the instant our headlong career. We got stuck again, and the whole process of working with the feet and tugging at the waterproof had again to be repeated before we got started again on our next little slide down. And so we kept on, going up some half-a-dozen times the same snow-incline and sliding down it again till it was nearing noon, when with lavish promises of bringing them back again in the afternoon I at last succeeded in taking my two hardy tobogganers away from the snow-slide which for the time being seemed to have totally captivated their little hearts.

The exertions of the morning, however, told on both my companions and so they did not press me to carry out my promises. And I was glad that they did not, for that was our last afternoon together and I wished to have a quiet tea with Lalla. And so I had it with her seated under a spreading fir overlooking the scene of our morning's "exploits." She had brought with her *The Call of the World* and after tea desired me to read to her certain favourite passages from it. I read accordingly the passages she pointed out, ending

with one of my own selection which ran as follows:

"In the daily round of life we meet but seldom people who from the first exchange of glances seem to take strangely to us and for whom we in our turn take a special and instantaneous liking ourselves. And when for once and a wonder the happy coincidence is brought about and we meet one of our kindred souls and are happy in the consciousness of mutual regard and affection, should circumstances bring about a severance of the happy bond, we feel in the anguish of the moment as if we were deprived of the one pure joy of life which at all events made life worth living. And yet extended travelling inevitably lays one open to such deprivations more frequently than ordinary routine life, for it is but natural that of the thousands we pass on the broad highway of the world we should now and again come across one or two who seem to have this mystical attraction for us and to part from whom would be a real trial, almost a calamity to us."

"Isn't this true in our own case, Lalla?" I asked, as I closed the book. She replied not, but turned away her face. And as she did so, I noticed a tear trickle down her flushed cheek. After that she suddenly became quiet and uncommunicative and almost morose. And so she kept for the rest of the afternoon and all that evening, and this came to me in such strange and melancholy contrast to the wild, boisterous hilarity of hers of early morning.

By a kind of latent sympathy I seemed to have caught her mood and was in consequence anything but in my usual spirits. Still, after dinner as we sat beside the camp-fire I tried to

cheer her up. But she sat unmoved, looking wistfully into the lambent flames as they soared up, and only an occasional sigh escaped her as a burnt-oût tree-trunk crashed into the fire and sent the flames hissing up. Nobody, however, could sit for long before a roaring camp-fire without having his spirits—no matter how congealed and frosted over—eventually thawed in its warm, genial glow. So were ours. And before long I was unfolding to her the plans I had formed of going into Tibet over the snow-bound Zoji Pass and then crossing over into the Ledar Valley by way of the dangerous snow-bridges. To give her some idea of the danger attending this prospective venture of mine, I told her of the incident which Dr. Ernest Neve narrates so graphically in his *Beyond the Pir Panjal*. Some years ago when the Doctor was on his annual holiday he happened to be near Baltal, and one morning when out walking saw with dismay a party of two English ladies crossing a snow-bridge which to his trained eyes appeared to be on the point of breaking down. The noise of the torrent was too loud for a warning shout from him to be heard by the party; besides he feared it might have made them pause and caused delay on the tottering bridge. So he watched with great anxiety the party as it moved over the bridge, and was considerably relieved when they were safely across. "*Within three minutes* of their safe passage" a great rumbling sound reverberated

through the valley, and the next moment the enormous span of the snow-bridge cracked and was hurled into the chasm and instantly swept away by the on-rushing tide of the mountain-torrent.

Lalla's hand, which lay clasped in mine, gave an involuntary nervous grip as I came to the last part of the story, and she asked me what made me take these unnecessary risks when I might just as well go to Ledar Valley by way of Islamabad as all other tourists did. But that, I replied, would entail a detour of considerably over one hundred miles and take up nearly a fortnight of my limited time in Kashmir, when by the way I proposed to go I could enter the valley in the course of a day, it being only eighteen miles from where we were. Besides, I said, I had always felt that a man's life should be one long experiment and adventure, and all my life I had had so very little of either that I was not prepared to miss the one sure adventure that was promised me by the snow-bridges. After that the conversation drifted on to various topics. and when I looked at the watch it was the mid-night hour. But that being our last night together, neither of us liked to turn in, and so we sat side by side alternately taking little whiffs from a cigarette and looking all the time into the soaring flames as they lit up in a fiery glow the camp, the sky and the surrounding snow-mantled hills. But after that, the fire being left long unfed, the logs began to burn out one by one and looked

as if they were themselves exhausted with the long vigil and were making preparations to drop off for the night. At any rate this was the idea they subtly conveyed to us, and reflecting as it did the state of our own minds for the time being, we both mechanically got up from our comfortable camp-chairs and in silence walked towards our encampment arm in arm with the faint star-light guiding our path. After seeing her to her tent and wishing her a hurried, unspoken good-night in the only logical way possible, I went to my tent, hastily undressed and was fast asleep, dreaming of enormous snow-bridges which crashed with a terrific noise as we went over them and left me and my men struggling in the mountain-torrent.

I was still battling with the tossing, foaming waters when I woke up with a start the following morning and found my men, instead of heroically fighting the cruel torrent, ignobly folding up camp-chairs and camp-tables for the day's march. The awful nightmare I had just then passed through and the bare idea that in an hour's time I would be again turned loose on the road and become once again the solitary tramp that I was then—away from friends and the one lone heart that had become so dear and precious to me in the space of a fortnight—weighed heavily on my spirits. I tried, however, to put a brave face on my momentary grievances, and when at breakfast I met Lalla I took to chaffing her in my usual way. But she sat silent and unresponsive, and when later

on I led her down to the pine bridge she walked beside me uttering not a word and only nodding at times absent-mindedly to my frequent questionings. When at last we reached the bridge, I picked a few wild wall-flowers with which Sonamarg simply swarmed just then and handed them over to her as a parting keepsake. A momentary sigh escaped Lalla as she pressed them to her lips and pinned them on her bosom. And I, not to prolong the agony of the moment, helped her to her pony and hurriedly reciprocated to her personally the attentions she had paid to my flowers: and she, forcing a smile on her face and waving with her whip a last long farewell, instantly rode away and left " the world to darkness and to me."

For the rest of the morning I felt much too disconsolate to speak or enjoy anything, and so tramped mechanically on towards Baltal. The Sindh bore us melodious company all the way and the flying mists played at hide-and-seek with the tops of snow-capped mountains all the time. But to me it all looked so blank and soulless that I walked looking vacantly ahead of me and was only once momentarily roused from my melancholy and a faint smile hovered round my lips, when the *khitmadgar* chanced to speak of the " *Chota-Memsahib* " and her wonderful kindness to them all. And I was not surprised at what he said, for the *Chota-Memsahib* was not only the favourite of our mixed party of eight but in a way the life and soul of the whole camp,—the pony-men especially looked up to her, ever since

that incident at Goond, as their own sure mascot and guardian angel.

Baltal was reached quite early in the afternoon, and for a change in the routine of camp-life I occupied the room I found vacant in the *dâk* bungalow there. As I was settling down in my room, in came a tall, big-limbed Englishman evidently advanced in years, but there was such ease and freedom in his movement and such an atmosphere of happy *bonhomie* hovered round him that he made a particularly fine picture of strength and geniality. He inquired of me where I had come from and whither I was bound, and then remarked that as he had been residing in Kashmir all his life and was well conversant with the locality round Baltal, he would be only too pleased if he could be of any service to me. This struck me as rather unusual in an Englishman who had resided long in India. For the Anglo-Indian as a rule is habituated to ignore the very presence of an Indian, if not actually to turn his back on him whenever he chances to come across him. But when I came to know the name of my new friend, I no longer wondered that he should have like a true minister and servant of Christ offered me a loan of his good-will and regard and come forward to help me in any way I chose. For he was Dr. Ernest Neve, the author of *Beyond the Pir Panjal* and the younger of the two brothers so well-known all over Kashmir for their missionary effort and enterprise in the relief of human suffering and the advancement

of their Lord's Word. To his query I replied that I had planned to go to Dras across the Zojila and then return and leave for the Cave of Amarnath and Ledar Valley over the snow-bridges. I said he had in his book called the last-named unsafe and warned the tourist against attempting them at that time of the year. So indeed they were, he replied, still as he had a day to spare he would personally go the following day to see the bridges for himself and then leave a word with the keeper of our bungalow to say whether they were or were not safe and practicable. His suggestion came to me like a godsend, for my mind was much disturbed ever since Raheema came and told me that on the way he came across the bearer of a returning *Shikari-Sahib* who on being questioned said that his *Sahib* had intended going into the Ledar Valley the way we proposed to go, but had to return after proceeding half-way as the bridges in some places had given way and broken up the track.

The evening passed off pleasantly enough in the company of the good Doctor and his wife. The latter's distinguished presence and winning manners, and the great fondness she betrayed for wild flowers, enlisted that very evening my esteem and regard which never abated but grew the longer I lived in Kashmir and the more closely I became acquainted with her. She it was who brought me a sheaf of wild columbines she had gathered in the woods to

decorate her table with for the evening meal. Larger columbines of a lovelier shade or a tint more delicate than the pale mauve and cream ones of Baltal I had never seen in all my varied wanderings round the world. Besides the columbines she had heaps of other wild flowers the names of which I cannot recall, and even if I did they would be too numerous to mention here. Suffice it to say that Baltal with its broad, sunny meadows, and covered as it was with a wealth of flowers of every tint and description, looked for the nonce like the Elysian Fields of old.

This nature-sown and nature-designed garden of Eden I left the following morning to cross the cold and dreary Zoji Pass. And so it proved to be before I had covered three miles of the rough road that is carved out of the solid rock of the stupendous mountain-side. The last trees were already left behind, and after that there was nothing in front but jagged ridges and sky-soaring masses of rocks with vast glaciers working themselves down between deep craggy hollows, leaving only a precarious path scratched out in their snowy precipitous sides by the forlorn wayfarer and his beast of burden. Little caravans of Tibetans, bound for Ladhak and Yarkand with the cotton goods of Bombay and Madras, overtook us now and again on the way, or we met Ladhakis and Yarkandis in their picturesque costume and felt snow-boots, going to Kashmir on yoked yaks or struggling forward with their

over-burdened ponies which frequently slipped and were momentarily buried up to their girth in snow till help came and the wretched creatures were dragged out and set up again on their feet, only, it seemed, to undergo a similar experience at the next crossing of the glacier.

As we neared the top of the pass the track was lost in one vast field of snow, as the reader can see for himself by turning to the frontispiece. And so it kept for miles together, breaking up only at rare intervals and laying bare patches of crumbling rock. Even late in the season snow-storms are not of infrequent occurrence on these high Himalayan passes, and Heaven help the unfortunate traveller who gets caught in one of them! In his book Dr. Neve narrates the adventure of a Moravian missionary who very nearly lost his life, being overtaken by a heavy snow-storm while crossing this very pass. The storm burst so suddenly, and so furiously did it rage, that before long the poor missionary lost his way, and moving about aimlessly hither and thither, he soon fell into a drift. There he lay exhausted, and when he had given himself up for lost, there emerged from the grey distance as if by a miracle two dim forms. He made one supreme effort and overtook them and found them to be postal runners with whose help he at length managed to reach the rescue-house on the top of the pass and was safe after that. That good strong silent Samaritan in stone and mortar we ourselves soon came to and passed by, and after fording several

glacier streams on the way we at last reached Mitsahoi. There we collected our exhausted ponies and rested them for an hour while I had a good look at the contents of my luncheon-basket and then sat admiring the magnificent panorama of vast glaciers and piled-up snow-fields which stepped down terrace by terrace into the mountain-stream by Mitsahoi. The road after that rapidly descended, and though we had to scramble along the edge of fallen snow-bridges and saw huge blocks of ice floating in the stream, the scenery on the whole was quite tame and uninteresting, and later on as we approached Matayan it became actually dull and monotonous. Not a single tree nor a vestige of life was to be seen anywhere. But look where one would there was nothing but crumbling hills in front of one, beside one and behind one. And when at last we reached Matayan, the place itself and the country in the direction of Dras and Ladhak looked so dreary and God-forsaken and the wind kept blowing such a hideous howl all the time and, to complete my catalogue of complaints, the people were so filthy, lived in such dingy, dilapidated hovels, and looked compared with the handsome Kashmiris so positively ugly that I resolved the moment I arrived at the *dâk* bungalow to proceed no further as I had originally intended doing. The reader would probably take me to task for these ideas of mine and say that I seemed to judge people and condemn them for what after all was their

misfortune and not their fault. And he would be right, if he did so. Ordinarily the condition of these Tibetans would have excited in me nothing but pity and drawn my active and immediate sympathies for their misfortune, and their barren, treeless country would have even, at any rate for the time being, interested me by way of contrast. But I was then in no mood for it. My own utter loneliness was weighing down my spirits and I wanted something specially lively and interesting to cheer me up. Instead I found a people hopelessly uncongenial and a country utterly dreary and cheerless, so much so that they tended to accentuate the very feeling I was striving to get over. Consequently, the human element in me asserted itself, and so the following morning saw me make a hurried departure from Matayan, and by tea-time I had retraced my steps over the Zoji Pass back into Kashmir. And what a pleasure it was to return to beautiful Baltal! How refreshing was the greenness of its fields, how cheering the sight of its flowery meadows! And there was an additional pleasure besides. Having returned a day sooner than I had arranged, I found the good Doctor and his wife still in Baltal, and how welcome and precious was their company to me that evening! To complete the joy of the day the Doctor gave me the gratifying news that he had explored some of the snow-bridges I was going over and found them intact and practically safe, and that unless some piece of

special bad luck awaited me I would be able to cross over into the Ledar Valley as I had planned.

The following day, consequently, we were busy making preparations for our great venture. As no pony could possibly be taken over the bridges, the pony-men were paid off and a special set of eighteen hardy coolies with a veteran guide was arranged for by Nadir Khan, the celebrated *daroga* of Sonamarg. Most of these picked coolies, I was told, belonged to villages away in the far-off valleys, and some of them had walked as much as fifty miles to reach Baltal. It was above all imperative that the day should be fine, otherwise I was warned it would be pure madness to embark on such an enterprise. We were evidently in luck's way, for the eventful morning broke bright and rosy, and before it was seven, with a light heart and full of expectations we had started on our day's march.

For the first three miles the road lay along the hill-side and so it was all plain sailing. Then we espied the first bridge, from the hollow span of which there burst forth a rushing torrent which tore down the narrow gorge, foaming and roaring. Soon we stepped on the bridge which felt strong and solid to the feet. The bridge had gradually worked itself up between two precipices, down the sides of which there rolled almost continuously *débris* of loose stones and crumbling rocks. It is these stones and rocks which continuously slide down that make the construction

of a pathway along the mountain-side well-nigh an impossibility; and even if it were constructed, as it has been in some parts, walking thereon except in an emergency would be sheer foolhardiness, for any moment a stone might roll down and kill one on the spot. Hence the congealed mass of snow arching over the mountain-torrent and spanning the space between the soaring precipices, though not unattended with risks and dangers, is the only practicable way between Baltal and Amarnath. Mile after mile we walked over this congealed mass of snow which steadily ascended in long curves between the two mountain-sides. Here and there its even surface had cracked, revealing at times not only deep crevices, but the tempestuous rushing torrent underneath. But whether cracked or broken up, I felt the snow-surface while I tramped thereon perfectly firm and safe to the feet. I was promised instant dangers and hair-breadth escapes, and here I was striding up the hollow snow-bridges with ease and nonchalance as if I were walking up the hard, solid surface of a macadamised road. This was not quite to my liking. I grew impatient and felt inclined to quarrel with my exceptional good luck, when all of a sudden the guide shouted out from behind: "Come away, *Sahib*, come away." Not having quite grasped the drift of his words and feeling the snow-surface under me as hard and as solid as ever, I simply ignored his warning and walked on. Thereupon he ran up to me and almost caught hold of my arm and

insisted on my coming away instantly with him. "Why?" I asked, surprised, and stamped the snow-surface at the same time to indicate to him how groundless were his fears. "Does not the *huzoor* hear the rumbling noise of the torrent?" he questioned me in his turn, apparently amazed at my coolness and indifference. "Yes, I do," I replied, "but what of that?" "Well," he said, "that is a sure and unmistakable indication that the surface of the snow somewhere near where we are standing has thinned away and must have thinned away considerably to let the noise of the torrent penetrate its solid mass." Realising now how every step forward was attended with instant danger, I thought it wiser to side-track a little as the guide had advised. "It is the neglect of these little warnings," remarked the guide, "that is the cause of most of the fatalities that have occurred on the snow-bridges." Then he told me of an Englishman who only a week before had lost two of his coolies because the guide failed to detect the danger-spots in time, with the result that the thinned surface gave way and those two unfortunate creatures were precipitated into the torrent and swept away before any help could be rendered to them.

As we proceeded further we found bridges broken up in several places, still we tackled them by taking a circuitous route, but when later on we came upon places where every trace of a bridge was swept off and nothing but the ominous waters of the torrent rushed between the two

precipitous mountain-sides, I, who as usual was leading, stood dumbfounded and felt that my great fear of our progress being cut short by a single missing bridge had at last come true. And the horrible prospect of having to retrace our steps back to Baltal and to Ganderbal made me almost wince for the moment! The guide, who was behind me, came up that moment and coolly surveyed the situation and as coolly remarked that we would be able to cover the gap by working our way along the sliding *débris* of the hill-side. "Along the sliding *débris* of the hill-side!" I repeated in blank amazement, and then asked him to point out the track, for I could not see any myself. "There is no track, *Sahib*," he calmly replied, "but that does not matter. We can easily make one for ourselves." His cool, assuring way was a relief to me, though my mind was not at all at ease, for I failed to see how we could possibly work our way along the crumbling hill-side without being precipitated into the raging waters at any moment. But before I could tell him of my grave doubts, he had stepped on the loose stones and was struggling with both hands and feet to go ahead. However, at every step the loose stones gave way and he slid down with them. But that did not perturb him. The moment the stones stopped rolling he took a step forward and again slid down for some distance, and then once again he moved forward attended with the same result, and so on and on,—while I followed in his wake and duplicated

his experience at every step till we came to the next snow-bridge.

Sangam was reached at noon, and with it practically ended the venturesome part of our day's enterprise. It is so called because it is the meeting-place of the Sindh and Ledar Valleys. From there over another series of snow-bridges the way lies to the famous Cave of Amarnath. Here, while I was resting and having my cold luncheon, I found my guide and two of my coolies belabouring for no apparent reason a couple of harmless *gujjars*. The sight outraged my feelings and I shouted out to them to desist from their hideous procedure and ordered them to come up to where I was seated. Being asked what they meant by setting upon unoffending people, the guide replied that the *gujjars* had a week before rolled down stones from the heights to scare them away, and now that they had got their chance they were simply returning the attentions the *gujjars* had paid them before. I had myself an experience of these queer ways of theirs while crossing the Zoji Pass, and so I jumped up on the instant, took my alpen-stock and was about to give them an idea of what they should expect from all wayfarers on account of their silly procedure, when the *gujjars* held up their hands in appeal and begged of me to listen to their side of the story. On my consenting, they said it was quite true that a week ago they had met my men and rolled down stones, . . . "What!" I exclaimed interruptingly, and raising

my stick remarked, "You have the impudence to make this confession to my face!" "But please listen," they replied remonstrating, "and don't be impatient. While we were grazing our sheep on the marg above, some of your men rushed up and forcibly removed the *loi*[1] from the back of an old *gujjar* and scampered down the hill. What were we poor *gujjars* to do but hurl stones at the absconding robbers!" I now saw how matters stood! So turning to my guide, I asked him to explain the accusation the *gujjars* had made against him and his worthy companions. "*Sub jutha, Sahib*,"[2] he instantly replied. I said I was not so sure of that, and then asked if he was prepared to swear by the Koran that neither he nor his companions had taken away the *loi* from the old man's back. He stood hesitating and would not vouchsafe a direct reply. That at once gave me a clue to the whole affair. In the meanwhile the old man had struggled up to where we were and repeated the tale of my guide's roguery and how he trembled the whole night long in consequence without getting a wink of sleep on the cold bare marg. I told the guide I was convinced that he and his band of coolies had robbed the poor man of his only blanket, and it must be returned to him, otherwise I would personally report the matter to the *naib-tehsildars* at Pahlgam and Gandarbal, and presently stood up to give them

[1] Kashmiri blanket made of coarse wool.
[2] All false, *Sahib*.

a taste of what they had given to the poor *gujjars*. They in their turn held up their hands and begged to assure me that my orders would be obeyed and the *loi* returned to the *gujjar* in a day or two. Knowing what a Kashmiri's word was worth, I told the *gujjars* that in case the guide and his worthy companions failed to carry out their promise in two days' time they were to come to me at Pahlgam where I would be resting for a couple of days, and I would have the guide and his companions reported to the *naib-tehsildar* there. They departed, bowing low and making long salaams, and begged that I would not deny them the final wish of providing me with as much milk and cooking-butter as I needed and of allowing one of them to show the way to the Cave. Their request being readily granted, one of them led us up another series of snow-bridges, till finally about five in the afternoon we got the first glimpse of the famous Cave and were before long inside it.

The hills round Amarnath being of limestone, naturally the Cave itself was formed by the slow denudation of the stone. It had a vast vault, but there was nothing remarkable about it except for an oblong slab of ice some two feet high. Yet that slab of naturally formed ice drew to itself vast crowds of devotees each year. Every August thousands of Hindu pilgrims come from the southernmost parts of India, walking thousands of miles and undergoing untold hardships to behold this image of their god Siva, who,

they believe, for the present has assumed a crystalline form and taken up his abode in that remote, forlorn Himalayan cavern. Strange that creatures endowed with reason and made after the image of their Creator should see no degradation in prostrating in abject fear and reverence before a mere block of ice! For once I understood the fearful potency of idolatry and how assuredly it leads to the crippling of man's sanity and will-power. So somewhat weary in limbs and quite sad at heart I left that spot of debasing superstition, and after walking up a hill and down by and over the last of the snow-bridges, I reached my camping-ground of Panji Tarni and found my men had already pitched my tent. I threw myself down on a canvas chair, and one of my men began to massage my weary feet while another hurried to pour out a cup of steaming hot tea for me. To realise what magic there is in a cup of tea and how quickly massage takes the fatigue out of one's wearied limbs, one has to take a long tiring march of some twenty miles over rough mountainous roads as I did that day, and have a good *masseur* handy by him as I had in my bearer.

Long I lay stretched in my canvas-chair that memorable evening, now passing off into a soft slumber, then admiring in a half-wakeful state the eerie scene spread around me. There was no sign of vegetation anywhere except for the flower-strewn grass under my feet, nor any trace of human habitation except for a small rubble-

stone hovel which stored fire-wood for any chance tourist and afforded shelter to a way-lost pilgrim caught in a snow-storm. Turn one's eyes where one might, snow-clad mountains met the gaze, with vast glaciers working down their sides and feeding the many streams which joined up to form a regular river, not far from the limpid, tossing waters of which stood my camp in a marg carpeted over with wild flowers. It was there at Panji Tarni among its silent hills and flower-strewn meadows that I realised as I had never realised before the glorious sense of utter freedom and solitude, of aloofness from all disturbing elements, of happy abandon and total irresponsibility in a lovely land unspoiled by the hand of man! These are the abiding charms of Kashmir, more felt than perceived, which make her the inspiration of poets and artists and bring in her train the lovers of nature and beauty from the uttermost ends of the earth!

The following morning we left Panji Tarni for Shisha Nag or the Mirror Lake. For the first few miles the road skirted a mountain-stream, now lying on this side, now on that, which necessitated frequent and tedious fording of the stream. However, when once we had left the stream behind and were walking gaily on hard, dry ground, there at the bend of a road arose an apparition which I thought for the moment would make all further progress impossible. The apparition was really a ring of snow-covered hills which rose gradually till in the far distance their

summits were lost in the encompassing mist. I stood stock-still, blankly looking at the white barrier before me. The guide coming up, I asked how he proposed tackling the fearful barrier ahead, for surely, I said, we could not possibly cross those snow-bound mountains. "That is exactly what we have to do and shall be doing before long," he replied with cruel unconcern, and stepped forward and led the way. But I remonstrated with him that I saw no track anywhere. "That is a very true story," he replied with truly Eastern sang-froid. There was nothing for me after his cool assurance but to follow him. I did so for some time, but later on, it grew misty and I could see nothing ahead of me but a vast field of snow. I nonetheless followed his lead, but I was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. When things were distinctly assuming a gloomy aspect for me, the mist lifted a little and there in the hazy distance I could see a dark object moving towards us. The next moment the guide had turned round and told me that a *Sahib's* party was coming from Shisha Nag in our direction. I asked him what made him say that, for except for that dark object I could see nothing. Nor could he see anything, he answered, but he knew from that object what was following it. And sure enough we had not gone a couple of hundred yards when another figure emerged from the mists and then another and yet another in quick succession, till at the tail-end of the long line I could just see two ponies, riding astride

on which were two individuals in helmets. The mere sight of the party changed the whole aspect of things for me. I felt quite at ease and sure that we were after all on the right track. Before long the leading coolie crossed us, and the English couple who were at the tail-end and looked so pale and careworn, rode up to me and inquired in an anxious tone if I had come by the Baltal way. On being told that I had crossed over by that way only the day before, they waved their whips and an almost audible hurrah escaped their lips, so overjoyed were they at hearing what I told them. They said that their guide had been telling them all manner of stories about the dangers of the Baltal way and dissuading them from undertaking so hazardous an enterprise. I remarked that similar attempts had been made to frighten me, but they need have no fears so long as they did not through over-assurance become actually careless. They in their turn then gave me the welcome news that the snow-pass we were on was not so high nor so endless as the mists made it out to be, and that if I followed their track I would be at Shisha Nag in a couple of hours.

We did follow their track, but it was long before I reached Shisha Nag. The first sight of it, however, more than compensated for the day's toil. Such iridescent turquoise-blue waters I had seen but twice before—in the Blue Grotto at Naplés and in the lovely Lake Louise up in the far-off Canadian Rockies. But what added to the beauty

of Shisha Nag were the fantastic-shaped snow-islands that floated merrily over the lake and cast such exquisite reflections in its translucent waters. I had my camp pitched right on the edge of a spur some hundred feet above the shore; and when late in the night the moon came up and lit up the whole scene around, Shishna Nag looked like an enchanted lake, so still were its waters and such silence pervaded its glistening glaciers.

The next day's march to Pahlgam being of nearly twenty miles, we started betimes, and it was noon when we came to Tanin and overlooked the whole length of one branch of the famous Ledar Valley. Here a strange difficulty arose. The *khitmadgar* came and reported that the sweeper had suddenly taken ill and was so bad that he would assuredly die if he were made to walk any further. Having got by then sufficiently well acquainted with the Kashmiri character, I knew the value of the ominous words the *khitmadgar* had used and was not a bit flurried by the gravity of the announcement. I simply asked how he proposed carrying the sweeper to Pahlgam, since we had no ponies with us and the fifteen coolies had their full load on them. He replied he did not know what suggestion to make. Nor did I know, I said, any way out of the difficulty. While we were thus discussing the point, with that providential coincidence that ordinarily happens only on the cinema-screen or the dramatic stage, there stepped out from a

thicket hard by half-a-dozen ponies in a state of nature with no reins or saddle-cloth on them. But my men were equal to the occasion. One of them instantly ran up and fell on the leading pony and got hold of him by the ears, while another made a noose of a spare rope we always carried with us and skilfully slipped it round his neck. A *loi* was next requisitioned from one of the coolies and a saddle-cloth hurriedly improvised, and within ten minutes the sweeper was mounted on it and rode with his arms thrown round the shoulders of my men on each side of him.

The *gujjar*, whose pony we had thus commandeered, came up and begged of me to let his pony go as he was going in a direction opposite to ours. I said as usual that I had a *parwana* from the Governor-*Sahib* of Srinagar which entitled me to press into my service men and ponies at any time and at any place I chose, provided I paid them their full day's hire. I was prepared, I continued, to pay him his due, but I would not make my sick man walk to meet his convenience. To my surprise he stepped up and readily fell in with my ideas and led the pony all the way to Pahlgam, which we reached quite exhausted late in the afternoon just as the sun disappeared behind its enclosing hills.

Pahlgam is very thickly-wooded, has a fine situation overlooking the main branch of the Ledar River and, surrounded as it is by tall precipitous hills, it makes a splendid summer-

resort for those of the English tourists to Kashmir to whom the endless gaieties and dissipations of Gulmarg make no special appeal and for whom Sonamarg is too cold, damp and distant for a prolonged stay. There was a regular colony of camps underneath the umbrageous pines, and at one end of it, overlooking the whole valley of Pahlgam, I had my tent pitched and at night a roaring camp-fire lit in front of it, which illumined in one blaze of light the surrounding encampments. Here I took a day off and passed it going through my bundle of newspapers and disposing of my accumulated correspondence.

The morning of the day following saw us started again towards Lidarwat to see the Kolahoi Glacier with its famous Twin Peaks. This branch of the Ledar Valley is more thickly-wooded and mountainous than the other which proceeds towards Tanin and by which we had come to Pahlgam. Grand and attractive as was undoubtedly the scenery around me, I found that each additional day I passed among wooded hills and craggy precipices I enjoyed them less and less. Not that the scenery had deteriorated, but my power of enjoying it was being rapidly exhausted. It seemed after a fortnight's feasting on Nature's choicest viands, I was fast losing relish for them, with the consequence that that noon found me trudging up the ascent over the village of Aru in a half-listless, half-complaining mood for my day's objective. While thus moving up in anything but good humour, I came upon an English

couple resting by the way, exchanging greetings and talking with whom my flagging spirits revived on the instant, and their mere presence seemed to infuse new interest and freshness into the scenery which not an hour before had appeared so dull and so stale to me. I found they were likewise going to Lidarwat to see the glacier. So we arranged to make the Kolahoi excursion together the following day, and at the appointed time next morning we met and proceeded towards the glacier. Milady was on horseback in men's riding-breeches, puttees and *puttoo* coat—the result, as I soon made out and as she afterwards confessed herself, of a little early morning pillaging in her husband's travelling wardrobe. Being freshly out, she had still a dash of fine English colour on her face; and being tall and beautifully-made, she made a very effective figure in the saddle. As I walked beside her admiringly and watched the grace and ease with which she managed her pony, I felt for an instant as if Diana herself—the beautiful huntress of the Greek mythology—had stepped back into life and assumed modern garb and language to conceal her identity. So strong was the impression left on my mind by that fleeting thought that I knew her then and know her now only by that Greek goddess's name. After walking some eight miles over rough track and crossing several glacier streams we had the first open view of the Twin Peaks of the Kolahoi Glacier. And it was worth all the

many long miles we had come out to see it. Diana with her keen eye and unerring instinct spotted a huge boulder under the shadow of which we sat down to our frugal repast. I had a free run of their luncheon-basket, and they more than a peep at mine, and Diana did relish the little offering I made at the altar of her youth and beauty in the shape of a slice of pistachio-nougat which my people had made for me and sent from my distant home. Long we lay stretched talking under the grateful shade of that great rock, and I certainly would have exercised all my arts to prolong our stay there and made the most of the congenial company that happy chance had thrown in my path, if it had not rumbled in the distance and great black clouds had not moved ominously overhead. Reluctantly we withdrew from our charming open-air retreat, re-crossed the glacier streams, and it was in drenching rain near my encampment that I bade good-bye and wished good-luck to Diana and her husband.

From Lidarwat I originally intended going back into the Sindh Valley, crossing over by the rocky Yamheur Pass. But being warned that the pass is likely to be snow-bound even in July, I sent my guide ahead with two men to investigate and report. They returned and reported that the pass except for certain portions seemed to be practicable, but on those portions the snow lay so heavy and impassable that for the coolies to attempt them with their loads on would be

positively dangerous, more so as a deep, yawning lake lay at the bottom ready to engulf any ill-starred creature that happened to miss its footing and slide down the precipitous declivity. A Kashmiri's word is to be taken *cum grano salis*, and so, had there been no other pass to cross over into the Sindh Valley, I would have cast the warnings of the guide and the coolies to the winds and attempted the Yamheur Pass. But I was told there was an equally interesting pass alongside it, which also led into the Sindh Valley and over which my guide was prepared to take me. Having no particular desire to take unnecessary risks, I readily fell in with his ideas and consented to go by the Soorphrar Pass, and so went up to Sekwas from Lidarwat the following morning, and from Sekwas we climbed right up to the summit of the pass. Having had to climb nearly four thousand feet that day, it was past four in the afternoon when we made the summit. Once on the top we could just discern the curving Sindh far, far down, some seven to eight thousand feet below us. But magnificent and awe-inspiring as the scene was of that distant, immeasurably deep valley, encompassed by a receding series of snow-clad hills, I did not stop long to admire it, as we had still far to go and the track now became narrower and wound dangerously round the edge of the cliff. Not long after it ended in a mere heap of stones, walking over which we came on the very brink of a sheer precipice with not a trace of track anywhere. My heart raced fast as

I stood dumbfounded on the brink, not knowing what to do. The guide came up and—pointing to the snow that lay accumulated between the precipice on which we stood and the other adjacent to it—said we would go down by that way. But the mass of snow sloped down between the precipices at such a dangerous angle that I felt he could not be quite in his senses to make the suggestion he did. I was certain, I said, I could not stand unsupported for a few seconds on that dangerous snow-declivity; how then, I questioned, did he expect me and the heavily-loaded coolies to go down it? The coolies, he replied, would find their way down right enough, if only the *Sahib* could somehow or other manage to go down with them too. "No," I said, "I cannot. The mere sight of the deep declivity makes me giddy; how then," I asked, "could you expect me to venture down it?" He must, I told him, find some other way. "There is no other way," he impatiently replied; "if the *Sahib* is afraid of venturing down the snow-slide, then let us without wasting time at once retrace our steps back to Sekwas and to Lidarwat, if possible."

Strange how a chance word sometimes changes the whole aspect of things for one! A moment before I was nervous and hesitating, but now that word "afraid" stung me to the quick and so completely reacted on my nerves that I felt I would sooner risk the most hazardous undertaking than let a Kashmiri for an instant think that I was afraid of doing anything of which he

was capable. I therefore retorted that he was totally wrong in supposing that I was *afraid* of going down the declivity. Why I hesitated all that time was because I felt it was impossible to go down that way. And to give him to understand that I really meant what I said, I edged round the cliff and without a second's consideration jumped off it on the sloping mass of snow. But, as expected, I found it impossible to keep a standing posture on a slope like that. I was wondering what next I was to do when suddenly I remembered how I had tobogganed down a similar slope with Lalla and her friend at Sonamarg. The thought had scarcely crossed my mind when I snatched my waterproof cape from the guide, and wrapping it round and knotting it up in front I sat down on the snow-slide and let myself go down it. For the first fifty yards it was comparatively easy, but after that the declivity looked ominously perpendicular, and, what was worse, there lay embedded in it sharp-edged rocks which projected at places most dangerously in our track. The guide, taking in the situation, took off his own *puggree* and that of the *khitmadgar*, unrolled them and made a long rope of them by tying them up. They then tied one end of it round my waist and, holding the rest of it firmly in their hands, they let me down freely, pulling up only when I approached a rock and letting me go again as soon as I had cleared it. Thus being alternately let down and pulled up, I at last managed to clear the rocks

and go half-way down the snow-slope. Here Sobhana, my plucky bearer, light-heartedly remarked that he would now try and glissade right down to the end of the slope without stopping once. To my unpractised eye it looked rather venturesome, but before I could warn him he had already started on his slide down, and gathering momentum he went down faster and faster till at the end of it we could but barely see his head between the mass of snow he had churned up as he cut his way through it. Sobhana's glissade made a magnificent spectacle and we all watched it with bated breath. Seeing his fine performance and the fearless way he did it, I was myself seized with a desire of duplicating it by keeping to the grooved track he had made and shooting down in the manner he had. Consequently, unfastening the end of *puggree* tied round my waist, I sat firmly on my cape, gave an extra knot to the loose ends and then, pushing myself forward with both my hands and feet, was presently fairly well launched in my enterprise of shooting a hundred-yard snow-slide at a break-neck speed. For the first fifty yards I felt just splendid, but every moment I knew I was gathering momentum and so dashed downwards faster and faster. The snow flew up on either side of me and lavishly sprayed my face and well-nigh benumbed my hands, which I frequently put out in vain attempt to control the speed. But there was such excitement, such exhilaration in that wild, headlong career

downward that after a while I was barely conscious of the terrific speed at which I was being whirled down. All that I now remember of that giddy glissade down the snow-slope of Soorphrar Pass is that my bearer ran up to me and stretched out his hands to assist me to get up as I sat helpless, half-benumbed, in a mound of soft snow.

Once I was on my feet and walked a little I was myself again, none the worse for putting the nerves and limbs to extra strain and all the richer for the novel experience I underwent. Then commenced a long and tedious wait for the coolies, who were barely half-way down the slope, struggling vainly to keep themselves and their loads together. But our long watch and patience was rewarded in the end, and the coolies were at last seen approaching us, and when they came within hailing distance we started off for our camping-ground for the night. The guide said it was only a mile or two from the foot of the slope, and we had been by then walking for an hour on end and still there was no sign of a camping-ground anywhere. We walked on none-the-less till at sunset time we came on a small clearance in the jungle across a mountain-stream, and there we stopped for the night.

The jungle was thick with trees and under-shrub, and it was some time before we cleared a space large enough to pitch my tent. But there was dry wood in abundance, and so before long a huge camp-fire was lit up, and in its cheering

glow later on I sat down to have my first hot meal of the day. But late in the evening when the whole camp had gone to rest and the camp-fire had almost burnt out, I still sat up listening to the yells of the wild beasts and watching the late moon as it peered above the encircling hills. Even in the wilds of the Himalayas no wilder spot than that on the topmost ledge of the Soorphrar Pass could well be imagined! And though neither I nor my men carried any fire-arms with us, not a thought of fear crossed my mind nor even a passing feeling of uneasiness took possession of me, so fully had I by then entered into the spirit of the wild, roving life I was leading. No matter how wholly a man may be city-born and city-bred and how completely his occupation may keep him fixed to a spot, there is always, I believe, something of the tramp and the nomad in the depths of the human heart. Anyhow I had long fancied I had an element of it, though I was born and brought up in town and my sedentary occupation kept me tied to my desk six days of the week. But I had no idea that that element would develop into such a passion that when the time came for me to leave that land of wild beauty and lordly ramble I would be contemplating the life literary that lay before me with actual fear and trepidation.

The next day's march was one long continuous descent of seven miles to Soorphrar and then another long dreary tramp of nine miles on a hard, paved road to Kangan. I practically ran

down all the seven miles to Soorphrar, but that tramp on the flat, dusty road to Kangan in the hot afternoon sun took out of me the last ounce of energy that was left in me that day.

That evening, in consequence, I felt too tired to do or enjoy anything, and as I lay listless on my canvas chair vacantly gazing at the fine prospect before me, the *khitmadgar* came and handed me over the accumulated mails of the preceding two weeks. I hurriedly glanced through the bundle of letters and picked out one, tore open its envelope and forthwith devoured the contents. As the reader might well guess, the letter was from the dear lone-heart I had left behind at Sonamarg and who wished now to bid good-bye to me on the eve of leaving a land which, as she quaintly and aptly put it, had pieced up for the time being the little rents in two drab webs of life by a single golden thread of mutual affection and regard. So potent a magic philtre that little love-missive proved to be, that going through it I felt not only the toils of the day all charmed away but every part of my body and limb was suffused with fresh vigour and energy.

My men having had to go to Gandarbal to secure ponies for our side-trip to Wangat Valley and Gangabal, the following day was proclaimed a rest-day, and in all Sindh Valley no better spot than Kangan could have been found to take a day off. My tent was pitched under a spreading walnut-tree almost on the brink of the Sindh, which raced in a noble sweep past our whole

encampment and opened out at the far end an extensive view of a range of hills which, tipped here with melting snow and there with flying mist, were lost in the far distance in the colossal precipices of Sonamarg. There under the shade of the spreading walnut I lay stretched the live-long day either writing letters or reading news-papers. There was nothing extraordinary about the day nor was there anything particularly attractive about the scenery, yet that day at Kangan I consider one of the grand days of my tour, such unnameable fascination hung round that quiet, shady spot by the Sindh and such perfect rest and peace it provided me with for the time being.

Before it was quite light my whistle blew the *reveillé* as usual the following morning, and not long after we had left Kangan behind and entered the Wangat Valley. Guide-books had apprised me of its few attractions, but the little vale has to be visited and leisurely walked through for one to be touched by its quaint charms and to become acquainted with the many points of beauty about its peaceful hamlets nestling snugly in the lap of the neighbouring range of hills. The Wangat Valley is so closely cultivated and the cottages are so regularly built up the side of hills and have such an air of tidiness about them, so unusual in the East, that going through it I was put strongly in mind of certain mountain-villages I had seen in Tuscany ten years before. However, what I liked most about the cottages was, what

Ruskin termed, "the unity of feeling"[1] they displayed so unmistakably in their conception and design. That is, by a kind of innate art-consciousness of the people the cottages were so designed that their outline imperceptibly took up and perfectly harmonised with the prevailing contour of the hills on which they were built. Barely has one begun to take in all the charms of this lovely valley, when one finds that one has come to the end of it. For Wangat Valley is the smallest valley in Kashmir, being scarcely more than six miles from end to end. But small as it is, in its own style I am not sure if it is not the loveliest in all Kashmir.

Scarcely had the valley ended when the famous Buddhist Ruins came in sight. Considering their total neglect and the long period of time that has elapsed since their erection, the ruins are in a wonderful state of preservation. Architecturally there is nothing remarkable about these temples and seminaries except the massive monoliths of which they are built. So massive indeed are the stones that one can with little patience count up the exact number of monoliths which go to form their sides and roofs. What, however, adds so much to the attraction of these temples and seminaries is the beauty and isolation of the spot selected for their erection. It is a well-attested fact that the Buddhists of old believed that much of the value of moral teaching and philosophic idealism was lost unless imparted in an environ-

[1] *The Poetry of Architecture.*

ment which went to help directly or indirectly their growth and unfoldment. Consequently, in the building of their great temples as of their renowned seminaries they pitched upon spots which by their isolation furnished that detachment of mind which philosophic meditation primarily demanded, and at the same time by their natural beauty reflected and sustained in a way the grandeur and nobility of the ideals they preached. Their celebrated seminaries of Nalanda and Taxilla, for instance, were built among beautiful surroundings away from the busy haunts of men. Anyhow the fine situation of the Wangat Ruins impressed me in particular. They overlooked at a height of a thousand feet an extensive valley through which hurried a limpid mountain-torrent and up which rose—

> " A steep wilderness, whose airy sides
> With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
> Access denied; and overhead up grew
> Insuperable height of loftiest shade,
> Cedar, and pine, and fir."

Facing such a tangle of steep wilderness I had my tent pitched and passed long hours of the moonlit night within the gloomy shadows of the ruins, thinking of the wonderful potentialities of a single superior human brain and the vast creative forces it unchained which for ages after moulded human character and destiny half the world across.

Nature loves contrast, it is said; of the truth

of which I found a ready instance in the Wangat Ruins. Amid all their fairy sylvan surroundings there was something to remind one immediately of earth and its sordid conditions. For no sooner was the tent pitched than its inside was half-filled with a black pest. Such legions of flies were there and so closely did they fill their ranks, that the three sides and slanting roof of the tent looked at eventide as if it were plastered over with a fresh coat of tar. If by some mischance one's head or hand touched their serried ranks, instantly the black scourge swarmed all over the tent, buzzing so wildly and annoyingly that one was compelled to decree another Massacre of the Innocents or move out of the tent till the wrathful creatures were once more peacefully settled down on their selected patch of tent.[1] But their peace was not of long duration; for early next morning before the first glimmering of light had

[1] Major Swinburne does not at all exaggerate when he says: "The Fly Question in Kashmir is becoming serious. Personally, I do not consider that fleas, mosquitoes, or any other recognised insect pests (excepting, perhaps, harvest bugs) are so utterly unendurable as the 'little, busy, thirsty fly.' It seems odd, too, as he neither stings nor bites, that he should be so objectionable; but his tickly method of walking over your nose or down your neck, and the exasperating pertinacity with which he refuses to take 'no' for an answer when you flick him delicately with a handkerchief, but 'cuts' and comes again, maddens you until you rise, bloody-minded in your wrath, and, seizing the nearest sledge-hammer, fall upon the brute as he sits twiddling his legs in a sunny patch on the table, then lo—

'Unwounded from the dreadful close'—

he frisks cheerfully away, leaving you to gather up cursefully the fragments of the China bowl your wife bought yesterday in the bazaar!"—*A Holiday in the Happy Valley*, p. 152.

spread over the valley the little black rogue was already up and busy. Once he had commenced his ghastly work for the day, sleep was of course out of the question. And well it was that he had pulled us out of our beds, for that day we had planned to go right up to Gangabal, and all my strong urgings would not have prevailed half so well with my men and coolies to hurry up as the gentle pressure from this perfectly harmless creature. The happy result was that long before eight we were already on the move.

For the first mile it was quite comfortable going, but soon the ascent commenced and with it most of our troubles for the day began. And the chief trouble lay with our pack-ponies. In less than four miles from the ruins the track ascends four thousand feet. Even on an open road such a gradient would in itself make a stiff pull up for pack-ponies: but lined as our track was with thick bushes and low branching trees, and loaded as our ponies were with baggage bulging out on either side, it presented extraordinary difficulty. Often the pony got entangled and the branch had to be lopped off or a deep gash made in the bush before it could proceed further. At times, however, the track became so narrow by the bare hill-side that a projecting end of the baggage got stuck in some crevice of the hill-side, and the pony, finding all further progress suddenly put a stop to and his sluggardly keeper not anywhere near him to help him, thought of a way out of the difficulty which

had the double merit of not taxing his patience and at the same time unfailingly leading to the attainment of his object. And the way was of simply lifting one of his hind-legs, and the next moment the obstructing load went clean over him and down the hill-side till some obstacle put a stop to its irresponsible career downwards. The whole cavalcade then comes to a stop at once. The sluggards for once rouse themselves sufficiently to rush after the disappearing object down the crumbling hill-side. After much hard swearing the truant load is secured and brought up, and scarcely has it been tied and lashed fast to the *fons et origo* of all our trouble, when one of his mates ahead or behind him takes into his head to repeat the trick for himself, with the result that the whole tedious procedure had to be gone through over again.

All this made progress very slow, and we did not do even a mile in an hour, with the consequence that it was past noon when we reached the top of the four-mile ascent. But once we reached the top and I had a hurried luncheon, we progressed much faster as the way lay now over the open mountain-summit and now down a well-trodden pony-track. But move fast as we would, we had barely reached Tronkol when the sun sank behind the low-lying hills in the far distance. Here we stopped for a while and gathered fire-wood; for at Gangabal, we were told, none was to be had. After leaving Tronkol we expected to see, if not to reach,

Gangabal every moment, but it was quite dark and past eight when we got the first glimpse of its placid waters with the snow-covered Haramouk standing guard over it at the far end. But it took another hour and much circuitous tramping before we reached its shore: and by the time the camp-kit was unloaded and the tent pitched it was already ten in the night. What with the many vexations of the day and with the thirteen hours' continuous march, my men were in no mood or condition that night to stay up any length of time, and so I had to forgo my one hot meal of the day, and even my hot bath to which at the end of each march I so longingly looked forward, and to rest content with a hurried cup of tea and a slice or two of stale bread and butter.

But we made up for the day's exertion by a perfect night's rest, and when I got up the following morning the sun was already high up in the heavens but the whole camp lay fast asleep. I had not the heart to disturb their well-earned rest and so I turned in for another short spell of it myself. When late in the morning I at last managed to drag myself out of bed and woke up the camp, I found on looking out of my tent a rather elderly Englishman fishing in the lake. Gangabal Lake I knew was sacred to the Hindus, and under the State Regulations it was a criminal offence to fish in its waters. The sight therefore of an Englishman whipping the lake quite unconcernedly was something novel and unbelievable.

I called up the *khitmadgar* to explain to me this strange phenomenon. "Why, that is Mitchell-*Sahib* catching trout," he replied, "That *Sahib* has a special *parwana* from the Maharaja-*Sahib* himself to fish anywhere and everywhere in Kashmir." I was further told that it was Mr. Mitchell who introduced trout in the State, and the whole department concerned with trout-culture is under his immediate supervision. Later on I met the great fisher himself and, to give me a taste of his speciality, he gave me the biggest and fattest of the nine which made up his morning's catch, and well I enjoyed that night that *Machi-Shikari-Sahib's* gift to me.

Mount Haramouk is by far the most striking feature of the mountain ranges immediately enclosing the Happy Valley. Times out of number and at all times of the day I had watched its snow-girt height. But to see it from near and make a personal acquaintance of it was the great desire that took hold of me ever since I entered the renowned vale. Now that I had camped within a stone's throw of it, I was naturally anxious to carry out that long-cherished wish of mine. But a strange difficulty arose! When I told my *khitmadgar* to arrange for a guide as I intended climbing a part of Haramouk that afternoon, he begged of me to forgo that idea, as all who had attempted to climb the sacred mountain had come to grief. I knew, of course, that the mount was sacred to the Hindus, inasmuch as they believed it to be the special abode of their

gods, and that it was reputed to be inaccessible. But I also knew that my friend, Dr. E. F. Neve, had as far back as 1900 shattered its reputation for inaccessibility by climbing its highest peak. I faced my man with this last fact and asked him to account for Dr. Neve's safe return. "O, the Doctor-*Sahib's* case is quite different." he readily replied. "He has been living all his life in Kashmir and was consequently under the special protection of the gods of Haramouk, to which the *huzoor* cannot well lay claim." I answered I had no particular desire to lay claim to the special protection of any god or man, nor had I any faith in the doings, evil or otherwise, of any power invisible or visible, except in those of my own legs. I, consequently, waiving aside his warnings and evil bodings, started in the afternoon for a short climb up hoary Haramouk. For the first thousand feet and more it presented no difficulty whatever, but once I had crossed the plateau up the first ledge, my way up was suddenly cut short by vast fields of snow out of which rose in sheer precipices the sacred heights of Haramouk. It was now evident to me that without ropes and ice-axes further progress was out of the question. So having rested awhile and roughly calculated for myself the fearful amount of crag-work Dr. Neve must have had to put in before reaching those tiers of ice-cliffs and rounded ice-falls, I returned to my camp, and the next morning, after taking in the full blaze of the risen sun a last long look at the

glittering domes and vast glaciers of the sacred mount, I hurried away on my day's march.

As expected, that day's march meant crossing a snow-bound pass and then over a series of flowery margs covering for miles the mountain-summits, till at the end of it began the long steep descent far, far down into the Nallah of Chittagul which we reached late in the afternoon and camped under a square of four chenars. The morning following we did the last short closing march of nine miles back to Gandarbal and found the dear old faithful *Constance* ready as ever to receive her long truant master and give him the rest and comfort he needed after the hardships and privations of well-nigh a month's camping-out. And long I lay stretched on a comfortable cane chair and passed the rest of the day in it, being too lazy to dress or go out. As I lay happy in the consciousness that I had at last completed exactly as I had planned the second of my Kashmiri walking-tours, I roughly calculated the number of miles I had tramped in this last tour and the many thousands of feet I had climbed. I found it yielded me a little over two hundred and fifty miles and some twenty-six thousand feet of mountain-climbing. Adding up the yield of the Lolab Valley and Gulmarg, I found I had more than half completed my intended thousand miles and nearly three-quarters of my proposed hundred thousand feet of mountain-climbing. But that happy consciousness was of short duration, for soon thoughts

of little Lalla and of the many happy days passed in her dear company there took possession of my mind and heart, and after that I became so restless and ill at ease that to get away from my unseasonable reveries I made one mighty effort, dressed and went out for a stroll. I could not, however, have made a worse choice, for each little sheltered spot and each little quiet nook had a tale to tell and brought back memories too deep-seated to be forgotten, yet too sacred for narration here.

Next morning we left our moorings at Gandarbal, and the following evening we should have been back in old Srinagar, had not the unexpected rising of the Jhelum made it impossible to carry the *Constance* through the lock-gate at the Seventh Bridge. We, therefore, moored the *Constance* for the night under one of the spreading *badshahi* chenars a little way down the lock-gate and I prepared to pass a quiet evening reading my letters and newspapers. But it seems my second walking-tour was not to end so smoothly and without my undergoing a strange and most unexpected experience that evening. For feeling restless on board, and as it was still early in the evening, I thought I might have a little stroll. With that intention I walked through a little village and then over the main Baramulla Road with the fields on the other side. As most of them were water-logged paddy-fields and a few nothing but wild marshes, they had a raised parapet over which ran a straggling track. I

followed one of these raised tracks with the idea of taking a complete round of the fields and back again to my starting-point. The track for some little while was open and easy, but soon I found it lined with wild Kashmiri thistles. As they did not actually impede my way I walked on unconcerned till I came to a kind of crossways. Here, as I halted to take my bearings, an old Kashmiri came along and inquired of me where I was going. I replied I was taking a complete circle of the fields and would then go back to the village from which I had started. The old man gravely shook his head and said, "There is no track that way, *huzoor*. The parapet is so thickly covered with thorn and thistle that they would assuredly tear the good wearing-apparel of the *huzoor*, if the *huzoor* went that way." I replied I felt truly grateful to him for his timely warning, and then, pointing to my thick ash-wood walking-stick, I continued I would make my way with that, no matter what came to bar it, whether it was a prickly thorn or a too insistent Kashmiri. "Just as the *huzoor's* good pleasure inclines him, let him do," said the old fellow, stroking his beard, and walked away. For a moment I stood hesitating, as I watched the drooping figure gradually recede and disappear in the distance. But it was only for a while that I hesitated, for I turned round as soon as the figure disappeared and moved forward on my set course. For the first few hundred yards I laughed as I leapt over the

small clumps of thistles I found obstructing my path, and thought rather poorly of the Kashmiri character that could let itself be overawed by such petty obstacles. But the thickets of thistles soon came to an end and were followed by patches of blackberry-bushes. The bushes being yet straggling and in patches, I found no particular difficulty in pushing them aside and making my way. But soon the bushes came closer and closer and grew taller and taller, and things then presented a distinctly ugly aspect. The thorns pricked horribly as I brushed past them, still somehow I managed to force my way through them, and at times quite light-heartedly, in the fond hope that the next bend of the parapet would see the end of the whole sickly business. The bends indeed came one after another, but there was no sign of the bushes thinning or disappearing. On the contrary, they became thicker than ever and entirely blocked my way. Nor could I strike across the fields, for there was nothing but a long-stretching marsh on either side of me. In the meanwhile so dark it had grown and such a distance I had covered by then that to turn back was out of the question and yet to move forward was next to impossible. For some time I stood panting and hesitating, not knowing what to do! But in difficulties like these, I knew, there is but one way out and that is—" to go ahead." Besides, there was just a sporting chance that if I went forward, the bushes might abruptly come to an end and leave

me at least with the consolation of having won through the difficulty that beset my path. With that thought I bounced into the thicket that stood barring my way, and the next moment I was entangled in it, my hands and feet, my cap and coat being all caught in the long spiny branches. I literally tore myself out of it by whirling my body completely round and out of it. And so with the next thicket and the third and the fourth and so on and on, till when I finally emerged out of the last of them I was breathless and exhausted, and large beads of perspiration stood on my brow and trickled down my back, and my light Cashmere suit felt as rough as homespun. When on returning to the boat I took off my clothes, I found the arms and legs sore with a hundred small scratches and pin-pricks. But a hot bath, rubbed down with a liberal quantity of lanoline, set matters right to a great extent, and my only regret was as I turned in for the night that Bunyan had not set up the Thicket of Irresolution in his *Pilgrim's Progress* and made Christian fight through it just as he made him wade through the Slough of Despond.

SRINAGAR AGAIN

" Life in Srinagar is a life of small things played out amid gigantic surroundings."—MARION DOUGHTY.

CHAPTER VI

SRINAGAR AGAIN

It was the middle of July when I returned to Srinagar. A new set of flowers bedecked its old gardens and waste spaces, and choice fruits filled its market-places and hung low on its trees. Each morning alongside the *Constance* came the fruit-*shikara* laden with plums and peaches, apricots and greengages, melons and damsons and the first pears and apples of the season. After the plain and scanty fare of camp-life for well-nigh a month, fruits were especially welcome and provided a great treat during the ten days we were at Srinagar refitting our camp-kit and re-couping our exhausted energies for the next tramping venture up north towards Gilgit and Baltistan. Part of the day was employed in reading up old papers and in doing up the correspondence that lay in arrears ever since I left the city the previous month. Old friends were looked up and new friends made, among them being a living, breathing Don Juan. I have been somewhat of a close and critical student of that rare creation of Byron's brain and am more than passingly acquainted with Tom Jones and

other fictional characters of his type. But the greatest feat of Jones and the most daring deed of Juan paled before the simplest exploit of this Kashmerian analogue of theirs in flesh and blood, and to such an extent as to put me in mind of that old saying that "Truth is stranger than Fiction." During these ten days of enforced rest in Srinagar, many an odd half-hour was filled listening to the exciting tales of daring and adventure of this modern Lothario, the narration of which would fill a good-sized volume and make a not unworthy companion-reader to *The Stories from Boccaccio*. Undeniably tainted as these revelations were with a certain pervading immorality, and deeply as I felt the underlying heartlessness of their cold narration, I could not yet say I was in any real sense shocked or even surprised at hearing them. I should indeed have lived in Kashmir in vain to have allowed myself to be surprised or shocked at anything I heard of that nature. I had not been in the land many weeks when I noticed in my own self and in those I came in contact with, a distinct lowering of the moral sense. And yet it was not so much a lowering of the moral sense as that the moral sense in us which normally remained wide awake and fully accoutred had, it seemed, of a sudden thrown off its coat of mail and gone to sleep. There is an old saying that in the Mid-Victorian days when certain virtuous Members of Parliament crossed the Channel they left their morals for convenience and safe custody in the cloak-room at Charing Cross and called for

them when they came back. I believe something of this nature happened to most visitors to Kashmir. At least that part of them which had not yet, to quote Shelley, "put love in chains," seemed to have left their morals in the left-luggage office at Rawal Pindi to be called for on their return. To these ways of the bachelors I was in an unexpected way introduced one day soon after my stepping into Kashmir. As I went in my *shikara* and happened to pass by a house-boat, it was at first usual with me to ask of my *khitmadgar* as to who lived in that boat. And the invariable answer given, once we were away from the main river, was—"*Bibiani-Sahib, huzoor.*" Being then a comparative stranger in Kashmir I asked the *khitmadgar* who this *Bibiani-Sahib* of his was. "The *Sahib* who has a Kashmiri *bibi* in his boat, *huzoor*," was the simple answer returned. When later on I spoke of these *Sahibs* to those of my friends who had spent their life in Kashmir, they remarked that things indeed had much improved of late, but there was a time not so far back when bachelors had all their own way and had become such a nuisance to other people who were differently minded that the State had actually to pass a Regulation prohibiting all bachelors of whatever creed or nationality from staying on the main river above the First Bridge, and a quarter was especially reserved for them in the Chenar Bagh on a side canal where they were free to live as they liked. To this day in Srinagar there is this quarter, known as Bachelors'

Quarter, and the bachelors in their turn have so jealously guarded their preserve that no married people are allowed to moor their boat within its limits. However, the manifest injustice of shutting off all bachelors from staying on the main river was soon perceived, and so the State Regulation was amended and bachelors were allowed to stay where they liked, but it was made a criminal offence for any one to have a *bibi* in his boat above the First Bridge right up to the end of the European Quarter.

I would have the reader to believe that the above remarks are made in no censorious vein, but are given as a mere statement of facts. I have lived too long and seen too much of the world to have any *absolute* notions about morals or to cherish any boyish delusions about the sanctity or infallibility of any moral code. I know, as most men who have given any thought to the subject must know, that morality, as its name suggests, is merely a set of *mores* or usages which have grown out of the conditions of our being, like our instincts and emotions, in adaptation to the conditions of existence around us. Much, consequently, depends on the conditions of existence around us, apart from which morality could have no validity nor even any use. Now the conditions of existence in Kashmir are such as would lead one to expect just such morals as actually prevail there among the visitors with no bond of matrimony to shackle their free impulses and prevent them from taking their inevitable course. The

wonderful air, the open outdoor life among some of the loveliest scenery in the world, free from the routine and responsibilities of office and away from the more exacting and less defensible demands of society, and above all the holiday mood of those visiting Kashmir, would all naturally and inevitably lead to an unwonted elation of spirits and animal vigour. And it goes without saying this exuberance of spirits and animal vigour must find some outlet. And what better or more natural outlet could it find than in the open manifestation and simple satisfaction of this primary instinct of life? At all events, we all somehow unconsciously felt that it was neither fair nor in the fitness of things to expect anyone in Kashmir to make any large oblations at the altar of his moral sense, and so no one there with any imagination and wide understanding felt scandalised at the mention of Bachelors' Quarter, as I am sure none of my readers with the same qualifications will look askance at me for speaking of it here in this book.

Amid all my occupations, frivolous and otherwise, I religiously took my morning-walk up the Bund. That was perhaps the one religious act of my life each day of the many days I stayed in Srinagar. Even the morning I left for my tour up north, I delayed going simply not to miss performing this act which had assumed such a semi-sacred character in my eyes. This new tour of mine was planned to take me from Bandipur through the Gurais Valley and over the Kamri

Pass towards Astor and Gilgit, and was expected to yield me full three hundred miles and some thirty thousand feet of mountain-climbing if I returned as I intended by the difficult way of the Tilail Valley and Erin Nallah.

TOWARDS GILGIT

" Such life there, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting Nature have her way,—
Where heaven looks down from its Himalayan towers."

BROWNING.

CHAPTER VII

TOWARDS GILGIT

THE river-trip was done in less time than expected and we were at Bandipur on the Wular Lake the morning following that on which we left Srinagar. The *naib-tehsildar* having previously arranged for the ponies, we started on our first march up Tragbal within two hours of our landing at Bandipur. And though the march was of barely twelve miles, yet having had to ascend four thousand feet on the way it was quite evening when we reached the *dâk* bungalow there. However, my mind was so wholly occupied viewing the wonderful prospect which each turn of the road opened out to me of Erin Nallah and of Bhonar Ravine, and my hands between the scenic turns were so busy making intimate acquaintance with the wild apricots that hung in thousands by the roadway that I scarcely felt that I had walked that day twelve miles and climbed four thousand feet. The interest of the next day's march lay in Rajdiangan Pass, from the top of which the guide-books promised a sight which is considered to be the greatest in all Kashmir—an unimpeded view of Nagna Prabat. Ever since

I had read Marion Doughty's description of that great mount,[1] Nagna Prabat had taken hold of my mind and imagination, and I was determined, cost what it might in time and exertion, I would not quit Kashmir without having a good long look at that "Seat of Gods," Dyamir, as the Kashmiris called it.

So full of expectations I left Tragbal early that morning ahead of my men and ponies in order not to risk the possibility of finding Nagna Prabat covered by clouds, as it was apt to be towards mid-day. In spite of all my hurry and hustle I was, it seemed, doomed for disappointment that day, for as I approached the top of the pass it became distinctly misty, and when I reached it a vast bank of clouds blotted out every vestige of the great object I was panting to see.

It was indeed a great disappointment! I, however, consoled myself with the thought that I would be having, as guide-books promised, even a better and nearer view of the great

[1] "Towards mid-day, peak after peak appeared, range after range showed glistering, and when all the ranks of snow heights were uncovered, there arose, ninety miles away as the crow flies, great Nagna Prabat, nearly twenty-seven thousand feet, one of the great triad of mountains that dominate the world. I had never before seen anything like it! I tasted Eternity that day, and felt myself immortal because I had realised the everlasting hills. Few things in this life have the hold and possess without dispute mind and memory, but never can anything replace that vision, and if when this 'passing shadow,' this short breath of life is over, and I rise to other existences, this memory will endure as a haunting sense of kinship with heights and stainless fields of snow."—*Afoot through the Kashmir Valleys*, pp. 217 and 218.

Prabat from Kamri Pass which I would be crossing in a few days. Console myself as I would with promises of assured good fortune that awaited me in the near future, the present disappointment was enough to weigh down my spirits and I was in anything but a happy frame of mind as I began to descend the pass. I was not, however, allowed to remain long in that mood, for hardly had I descended a hundred yards when such quantities of flowers spread themselves out on either side of me and in such variety, that watching them and taking mental notes of their species I forgot all about my great grievance against Nature and readily forgave her for her past bad conduct towards me. There were such vast fields of golden primulas and buttercups, marigolds and marguerites, with interspersing sheafs of pink hollyhocks and purple larkspurs, giant forget-me-nots and wild sunflowers, that it looked as if millions of yards of cloth of gold were rolled down the hill-sides, all embroidered over with rich designs picked out in patterns of pink and purple, orange and blue. No wonder Bernier called Kashmir " the terrestrial paradise of the Indies " and Moore raved over " the wilderness of flowers of that Valley of Bliss "! Long and in leisurely fashion did I regale myself on the feast bountiful Nature had provided me with that day, and it was with a light heart and unlabouring feet that I stepped into the *dâk* bungalow at Gorai that afternoon and passed the night there.

The following day's march to the Gurais Valley, though decked with flowers and lined with waterfalls, being on a practically level road was tame in comparison and became actually wearisome towards the closing stage. However, when we were once in the valley itself and had rested and pitched our tents on the bank of the Kishinganga just round a bend where its racing waters swirled past in a wide sweep, that I realised that what Dr. Duke said about the Gurais Valley as being "one of the prettiest valleys in Kashmir" was no mere casual or conventional remark but a plain statement of what this lovely little vale might justly lay claim to. In such bold sweeps did the hills enclosing it rise, and in such gentle curves did the undulating line, joining up the mountain-summits, run along, and so well-wooded and delicately-tinted was the whole valley that the day I halted there was all too short to investigate all its fine features and take in all its many beauties.

But in spite of its many attractions I was not sorry to leave the Gurais Valley, for my heart was set on seeing the great Nagna from the Kamri Pass and the enforced stay of a day in the valley only whetted my impatience. The next day's march of sixteen miles brought us to the Kamri *dâk* bungalow, which though nearly eleven thousand feet high was yet three miles short of the top of the pass. As the guide-book said that clouds were apt to collect round the

higher peaks after seven in the morning, and as I knew it would be impossible to be on the top
12 of the pass by that hour no matter how early we started, I resolved to make, in order not to give any excuse to Nagna to hide itself away from me this time, a short march to the top the following day and camp there for the night. When I remarked to my *khitmadgar* that I intended camping that night on the top of the pass, he momentarily winced and his face presented such a look of fright that I at once made out that my rather venturesome intention would have to run the gauntlet of his opposition. He, however, said not a word in reply but stood like one stupefied. I thereupon asked him the reason for his silence. "No anything, *Sahib*," he laconically replied, "the *huzoor* would not be able to camp on the top, as no milk was to be had there, nor fire-wood, nor even water." If that was all, I said, the difficulty could be easily solved by carrying up the things ourselves. Being cornered here, he had another objection ready at hand. "It would be so bitterly cold at night on the top that without doubt we would all be frozen to death if we stayed up there after sun-down." Here I knew he was on surer ground, for the top of the pass was over fourteen thousand feet—that is, higher than Jungfrau and Matterhorn and only a few hundred feet short of Mont Blanc—and that it, in consequence, must be a fairly cold place at night it needed no argument to convince me. Besides I had read that many years ago the

Kashmiri Rifles halting for the night on the top were caught in a blizzard and in the wild scramble that followed half the number lost their lives. Fortunately for me the *khitmadgar* knew not of that incident and I made light of his fear of cold, and so the following morning we started on our short march to the top.

For the first mile or two we walked between fields of flowers with giant pines lining the road on either side. But later on the pines deserted us and the flowers before long followed suit, and soon there was nothing round us but bare hills and huge rocks with patches of snow on them. By noon the top was reached, and with a strong wind blowing madly across and the snow lying in large patches around, things did look a bit gloomy and I for the moment felt scared myself and was, consequently, hesitating whether I should after all halt on that cold, dreary, windy spot or more wisely proceed on to more congenial quarters down below on the other side of the pass. But I conquered my momentary irresolution by instantly giving order to pitch my tent. And once the tent was pitched, my men were too busy getting fire-wood and water and milk to think of the dangers attending our high-perched camping ground.

Wood and water were with some difficulty procured. But milk presented quite a problem. While we were discussing it, one of the men espied a flock of sheep and goats hurrying down the hill-side. A moment later he with three

others ran helter-skelter down the pass in hot pursuit of those fast-disappearing objects on the other side. The flock had a good start and for some time it looked as if it would escape its milk-thirsty pursuers. But my men were not to be so easily put away from their purpose, and so they increased their pace and were soon seen distinctly gaining on what they had marked down as their legitimate quarry, and before long the fleetest of them had actually overtaken the flock and stayed its progress. I closely watched the chase and shouted out a cheering word at intervals, and when they returned with a goat in each hand I greeted them with a round of applause and *shabashes*. A vessel was soon procured and all the goats were milked in turn, and when we had as much milk as we wanted, I ordered the *khitmadgar* to pay off the goatherd. "There is no *bukarwan*," he replied. "Then who was there to look after the flock?" I asked. "The *bukarwan* ran away, *Sahib*, on our approach." "Well," I inquired, "what are we to do with the goats now that we have milked them?" "The goats will go home all right," he quietly replied. "The *Sahib* need have no anxiety on that score."

Towards evening the weather improved and the sky became absolutely blue all round with just a bank of clouds lining the horizon and shutting off the dear object of our heart and hopes. And as the evening advanced the wind dropped entirely and the stars came out in all their glory,

which at that height of fourteen thousand feet made a wonderful sight, and so all felt we were in luck's way and went to bed in high hopes of realising at last the great object of all our many days' toil and fatigue. At midnight I happened to wake up and put my head out of the front flaps of the tent and found the stars bright as before and twinkling more wonderfully than ever. After that I fell into a sound sleep, and when next I woke up and looked at my watch it was very nearly six. So I jumped off my camp-cot and hurriedly opened the tent-flaps in full hope and expectation that the great mountain of the Northern Himalayas would burst upon my view in one unforgettable sight!

And what sight, thinks the reader, I got on opening the flaps? Not of the king of the mountains with its glittering heights, but of a thick grey fog with the rain drizzling in that quiet, hideous way which was enough to damp the spirits of the most high-spirited man alive. I stood as one stupefied, blankly gazing at the impenetrable greyness in front of me, but a piercing blast of icy cold wind soon sent me shivering back to my cot and I tried to hide my unconcealable disappointment as best I could in the thick rugs that lay on it.

But it was not long that I lay collapsed in my bed in that mood of utter dejection! My hand before long involuntarily went to the whistle under my pillow, and once I blew the *reveillé* on it the whole camp woke up and was soon astir.

And later on when I shouted to my *khitmadgar* to bring some hot coffee immediately, he came into my tent shivering, and chafing his hands said that he could not light fire as every bit of wood was wet. "Well," I replied, "I must have something hot to drink somehow," and then pointing to the two poles that stood lifting the two ends of my tent-porch I said, "Take them away and make a fire with them and get me my cup of coffee." And, wonderful to say, before I was quite dressed, the cup of coffee was laid hot and steaming on the table.

By nine we moved down the pass, and by the afternoon we reached Kalapani, and after resting a little pushed on to Shankargarh ten miles away. But in what utter contrast was the state of things around us now to what prevailed early in the morning! It was then freezing cold with rain and mist, it was now baking hot with clear sky and scorching sun. I then looked out for a passing streak of bright spot in the grey void round me, now I cranked my neck for a patch of passing cloud to shade me from the grilling heat of the sun. My men came and complained that they felt as if the soles of their *chuplees* burnt their bare feet. And no wonder that they did, for the road was of loose sand and in that heat the sand felt like an open oven. But the strangest sight of all was to see in that desiccating heat of sandy waste huge blocks of the previous winter's snow sticking at the bends of the fast-flowing Kamri with the sun shining full and strong on them. I

asked several people who had spent their lives in Kashmir how they accounted for that extraordinary phenomenon. But none could explain how the winter snow came to lie thick and unthawed under the scorching rays of a mid-summer sun!

We stayed for the night in the *dâk* bungalow at Shankargarh and next day started on our sixteen-mile march to Ratu, getting at the start a glimpse or two of a portion of Nagna. We were wet and soaking when at tea-time we reached the military cantonment of Ratu. From Ratu I intended branching off from the main Gilgit road into the Rupal Nallah and staying for the night at the village of Tarshing, reputed "to be surrounded by Alpine pastures and close to the foot of the glaciers, immediately above which the vast precipices and towering snowy dome of Nagna Prabat rise towards the zenith."

But here again I was baulked in my great desire of seeing the mighty Prabat! As ill-luck would have it, the bridge spanning the Rupa River had snapped but a week before, and as it was not possible to ford the stream at that time of the year, I had no choice but to give up the idea of going to Tarshing, and so made a sixteen-mile march to Gurikot and there took a day off after five days' continuous marching.

A strange difficulty arose here. As there was famine all over Kashmir the year I was there, no grain or food of any kind was to be had once we had left Srinagar. We had, in consequence,

provided ourselves with enough provisions to last us the many weeks we would be away from the city, and in fact, I had to have an extra pony solely to carry the "rations" of my five men. But with that thoughtlessness for which the Kashmiris are so noted, my servants light-heartedly ate up during the fortnight we were away nearly all the rice and wheat-flour they had brought out with them. And so at Gurikot my *khitmadgar* came and gave me the astounding news that they had nothing to eat for the following day as their provisions were all but exhausted, and then went on to say that if the *huzoor* did not really mind he would be pleased to give a little note to the *naib-tehsildar* at Astor to provide them with fifteen days' rations of *shali* and *atta*. With starvation facing him and his companions, the extraordinary coolness of the man amazed me! I took him instantly to task for his rank stupidity and criminal improvidence and then gave him "the little note" he desired, though of its being of any help to him I had grave doubts.

My worst fears came true the following afternoon when Raheema returned empty-handed with but a bare reply from the *naib-tehsildar*, who as usual was "most anxious to help me," but "very much regretted that he was unable to do so," as the stores of rice and flour at Astor had been exhausted only a week before. The result of it all was that we had to give up going further north, and proceed south as fast as ever we could

back to our starting-point. But we were full eight marches away from Bandipur, and at the fastest we could not possibly do them in less than a week. On what were my men to subsist in the meantime? Of course, there was my own stock of rice and wheat, but were it made available to all, it would only mean that before long we would have to discover ways and means of feeding an extra mouth, and a delicate mouth at that. Still, as it was for the moment the only visible means of saving my men from actual starvation, I called the *khitmadgar* and told him to take from my stocks at each meal just enough to keep them going and no more. "No, no," instantly rejoined the *khitmadgar*, "that cannot be." "Why not?" I inquired. "The *Sahib's* own stock was very limited," he replied, "Even if we took just enough to meet our bare necessities, it would not last us all quite two days." "Never mind," I said, "we'll trust to our luck to help us on." And soon it proved that we had not trusted our luck in vain, for at Chillum Chowki at the end of our second day's march we found the store-houses of the Military Commissariat Department. Immediately on our arrival there the *khitmadgar* was sent away to take in our supplies from the stores. But here again he returned empty-handed and brought with him the *Babu* head of the stores. The latter in the florid language of the land explained to me how his heart would be only too delighted to relieve the dire necessities of the *huzoor* and his sorely-stricken men, and if

he were to consult his own wishes he would rejoice to supply us with all we needed: but he was grieved beyond measure to have to tell me that his Captain-*Sahib-bahadur's* orders were not to give an ounce of rice or wheat to any one outside the Army. Consequently, if he disobeyed the orders and gave me any part of his stores he would be committing *budmashi.*[1] So he would be assuredly, I replied, if he let me have any of his stock without taking means to replace it. But if I gave him the full price of the things I took away plus all the expense of getting them from Bandipur, and if he took care with my money to replace them faithfully, there would be no *budmashi* in reality and his heart would have the delight it sought of helping me and my men. Noticing his hesitation I went on to say that I could not let my men starve when there was food in abundance in his stores. If he liked I would, I said, leave a note with him for his *Sahib-bahadur*, taking upon myself the responsibility of having taken our supplies from him in spite of his remonstrances. The net result of all this pleasant conversation was that my men commenced their third march with a full stomach, and my ponies fully loaded.

As the reader will see from the map attached to the book, two roads run in a loop from Astor to Gurais, one over the Kamri and the other over the Burzil Pass. I was returning by the latter and that day I was to cross over the pass. I had

[1] Roguery.

by then given up all hopes of seeing Nagna Prabat, but the guide thought that I stood a good chance of catching a glimpse of it from the top of the pass. So when in the afternoon I reached the top, cherishing the hope that springs out of despair I impatiently looked round for Nagna, but Nagna as always vanished behind a bank of clouds and remained as ever a mystery to me. The top of the pass is not a safe place to stay at;[1] and even if it were, I had no desire to court another assured disappointment such as I had experienced on the top of the sister-pass on the other side of the loop. Consequently, that night we passed in the *dâk* bungalow which was built on an eminence at the other end of the pass and commanded a fine panorama of glaciers and snow-laden mountain ranges. The following day a short march of twelve miles brought us to Pachwari, and the day after another march of fourteen miles back to Gurais itself.

But this last march was taken under circumstances that turned it into the most tedious and fatiguing of all the marches I had up to then in Kashmir. It began to rain no sooner we left Pachwari, and so it continued all the way to Gurais without a moment's respite. In such

[1] "This is a dangerous stop, and it was here that the detachment of the 5th Goorkhas suffered severely in October 1891, when on their way to the Hunza Nagar Expedition. A severe storm set in about noon, accompanied by spindrift, and the track was quickly obliterated. Blinded by the deadly spindrift, whirling particles of frozen snow, the party were unable to find their way, and the whole night was spent on the pass."—Dr. DUKE'S *Guide to Kashmir*, p. 298.

wretched weather walking on even a well-made road would have taxed one's patience to the utmost, but on uneven sticky clay road, such as the Pachwari-Gurais road was apt to be in wet weather, it was a veritable imposition. The worst of it all was that a whole mule-corps of the Indian Army had of all days of the year chosen such a day for their march on their way to Gilgit. The result was that the road was simply churned into a thick quagmire in which the feet were fixed right in up to the ankle, and every step meant deliberate pulling of the foot out of its agglutinated mud and putting it forward again, only to repeat the tedious operation at every step. All the morning and most of the afternoon I bore it patiently and with set lips trudged in that sea of slush and mud without letting a word of complaint escape me. But a couple of miles before Gurais my resolution at last gave way and I found I could no longer bear up with the endless stream of mules that passed me and splashed me as they passed, and so for the first time in all my thousand miles' tramp I got on the emergency pony that always accompanied us on all our marches, and ended on its back the toils and vexations of the day.

But that day, it seemed, I was destined for additional disappointment. The reader will remember I had planned a side-excursion to the Tilail Valley and intended reaching Bandipur by way of Erin Nallah. To carry out that plan of mine I sent for the keeper of the *dâk* bungalow

as soon as I had changed my dripping wet clothes, and ordered him to have ready the extra men I needed for that rather difficult excursion. The moment the word "Tilail" left my lips, the man opened wide his eyes and kept staring at me. On my asking him the reason, he replied that in the valley to which the *Sahib* wished to go there were no roads, in places not even a regular track, and the tracks, such as they were, were so steep and in wet weather so apt to be sticky that should it rain even for half an hour the *Sahib* with his ponies would assuredly get stuck there for the next day or two. Consequently, to take ponies over such treacherous tracks would be to court certain disaster. I said if that was so I would dismiss my ponies and have coolies instead. With that intention I wrote at once to my friend, the *naib-tehsildar* of Gurais, and solicited his assistance. My *khitmadgar* returned with a verbal reply to the effect that the *Tehsildar-Sahib* had asked him to give me his best *salaams* and *mubarakbadi* [1] on the success that had attended my tour so far, and to say that nothing would have given the *Tehsildar-Sahib* greater pleasure than to be of assistance to his friend the *Sahib-bahadur*, but as not a coolie was to be had in Gurais, the *Sahib-bahadur* had better keep his ponies and try his luck with them.

Following the advice of my good friend, I made up my mind to try my luck with my ponies, and so, resting them for a whole day, I left Gurais

[1] Congratulations.

early in the morning of the third day for the Tilail Valley. The way lay right over and down a three-thousand-feet-high mountain-pass which presented excellent views all round of mountains and valleys. Of these the most entrancing was of the Tilail Valley itself, which we entered about tea-time. The camping-ground, however, was quite six miles away at a place called Gerinal, and so it was quite dark when we reached it and encamped for the night.

Up to the Tilail Valley the track, though steep and rough in places, was yet quite passable, and, what was best, we knew where we were going and how long we would be on the march. But once we left the valley we felt as if we were moving towards *terra incognita*. The *naib-tehsildar* of Gurais knew as much of this route to Bandipur as ourselves, and even the *zahaldar* at Tilail could procure me no guide or give me any certain information except that he was told of *Shikari-Sahibs* going to Erin Nallah by the way I proposed to go. And the worst of it all was that even the guide-books I was carrying gave no indication of the route on their maps and referred to it only incidentally in the text. For instance, Dr. Duke disposes of the whole matter in a few sentences, thus:

"The route from Tilail to Kashmir is more difficult. It ascends from Gerinal to 11,000 feet, keeps for many miles along the grassy ridge, then descends to Lohinsa, a camping-ground in what is more like a hole than a valley. From Lohinsa, 9,000 feet, it ascends to a ridge 13,500 feet, and again drops to a grassy open valley

called Gadasar, 10,300 feet. All the above marches represent seven or eight hours' journey for coolies. Ponies can traverse it, but not at all seasons, and always at risk to their loads, if not to their limbs."

This was all the information we could extract from the guide-books to base our plans on! Not a word vouchsafed to us about the route after Gadasar, and we were left to guess the number of marches we would have to do to reach Bandipur. It was manifestly unwise on our part to move forward without first assuring ourselves of the route we were taking. But our long marching experience had taught us to take many things on trust and leave sufficient margin for "the glorious uncertainties" in which indeed lay, as I soon made out, the chief charm and all the educative value of long tramping expeditions. Anyhow, it taught one to keep one's eyes open, and one's wits about one, and in the case of any sudden emergency or danger to rely on one's own unaided instincts and resourcefulness to get one out of it. We did not, of course, know when or how we were going to Bandipur, but by that time we had acquired sufficient confidence in ourselves to know that we would be going there somehow. At all events we knew that from Gerinal we were going over the mountains to a mountain-hole called Lohinsa and would be camping there for that night. Fortunately for us the tiffin-coolie knew part of the way of this particular march. So off we started on our day's march with him as our guide.

The first part of the march lay over a mountain-track which steadily ascended for some three thousand feet. Once the summit was gained, we kept to it for the next eight miles and more till we found a narrow path going down into a valley in continuous zig-zags at a dangerous angle. So dangerous indeed was the angle at which it descended that each of my men had to tug at the tail of his allotted pony to prevent it from sliding down the track and over into the ravine below. It was while we were going down this track that I learnt why the keeper of the *dâk* bungalow at Gurais had warned me that half-an-hour's rain would mean a stoppage of two days wherever I happened to be. For if our ponies had to be pulled by the tail to keep them from sliding down the track when it was perfectly dry, it was evident that, when wet, they would not be able even to stand on it, let alone go down it.

At last at dusk we reached the bottom of the ravine and saw the Hole of Lohinsa, in the shape of a triangle barely thirty feet wide. On its three sides rushed mountain-torrents. So furiously did the torrents rush, and so very high and precipitous the mountains enclosing the Hole rose, that I thought that if we were to camp on it, we would be swept out of it and hurled into the hurrying torrents by the first heavy shower of rain that happened to come down. In other words, the Hole formed a regular trap, the mere sight of which made me so uncomfortable that I asked the tiffin-coolie if there was no other safer place

where we could encamp. There was one, he said, above the glacier that came down the valley, but as the way to it, he continued, was long and steep and lay mostly over snow, it would be a long time before we reached it. As it was already dark in the Hole and as we and our ponies were all quite fagged out by the long day's march, I thought it best to camp where we were and take our chance.

We all knew the imminent danger of our situation! For even if a heavy downpour did not actually sweep us off the triangle into the torrent, a passing shower would be enough to make the track impassable for ponies for hours together. Try as I would to sleep and forget the hole we had landed ourselves in, I could not rest that night for half-an-hour together, and so every now and again I popped my head out of the front-fly to see what the sky looked like. We were, it seemed, distinctly in luck's way. For all night it kept perfectly clear and the moon shone brilliantly all down that treacherous hole and made the ghastliness of the scene around all the more evident to me.

The next day broke equally fine. And well it was that it was fine, for the pass we were going up that day was one long continuous snow-bridge that lay enclosed between the precipitous sides of two mountains-ranges and ascended in tiers almost to the top some five thousand feet above. When we were half-way up the pass the sun came up and shone on that winding-sheet

of snow in all his glory, and it was mid-day when we at length reached the top of the pass. In that brilliant weather I was not much fatigued going up that ascent of well-nigh five thousand feet, and so I went off my track to climb a couple of small hills and have my luncheon on the top of the third which rose above them all. I had not quite come to the top when, at a bend, I beheld, most wonderful to say, the object of all my many weeks' fruitless chase, which had the more persistently eluded me, the more determinedly I had gone in pursuit of it! For there rose in front of me in all his unsullied purity and sky-soaring grandeur the great Nagna—

"King amidst kingly mountains,
Monarch o'er snowy heights,
Girdled with glacial fountains,
Fenced by avalanche might,
Battlements towering skywards,
Pinnacles glistening bright,
Who shall dispute, *Dyamir*,
The crown that's thine by right?"

Indeed, none of the galaxy of snowy heights that stood around seemed to dispute the crown that was indisputably Nagna's! And what heights they were and in what endless succession they stood! When at length I reached the open, windy top, such a height I had myself attained that afternoon and such a very extended view opened out to my ravished gaze that bright mistless day, that I felt as if I were on the Roof of the World beholding a world-panorama. I fancied I could see the whole Himalayan Range around me

and with the help of a map picked out every known peak, so sharp and clear did each stand out against the blue profundity beyond. There on my right were the twin peaks of Nun Kun and the snowy pyramids of the Brahma Range and the mighty Mustagh with the renowned K.2, and away in the great distance fronting me I could clearly see the mammoth back of Kinchinjunga curving beside the rounded top of Mount Everest. Whilst these towering peaks rose, one and all, in groups and their outlines were partly obliterated or intercepted by adjacent heights, Nagna stood apart, all by itself, in majestic isolation, and its mighty masses of virgin snow rose in their pure and unbroken outline sheer twenty-seven thousand feet and dominated every height and peak in that vast enthralling scene. No wonder that the renowned Alpinist, Sir Martin Conway, remarked that, " the scales of the Alps fell from his eyes " when he saw the monarch of Central Asian heights, and well might Marion Doughty exclaim in the ecstasy of her great soul that she had tasted Eternity the day she saw Nagna, and felt herself immortal because she had realised the everlasting hills. It was with feelings like these that I stood for an hour and more on that lowly unnamed peak of fifteen thousand feet and drank in one big draught the transcendental peace and happiness that filled the wonderful scene around me.

Most people prefer perpetual trickle of pleasant liquid. Only a few like their thirst quenched in

rare big draughts from foaming tankards. Anyhow I had that day the drink of my life straight from the font of primeval Nature and felt at peace with myself and the world around me. In this happy mood I practically ran down the Lohinsa Pass and light-heartedly crossed the crumbling snow-bridges that span parts of the way down. Once down, there was a tedious walk of some eight miles and more, now over open country and then through forest glades, but such was my elation of spirits that at the end of that very exhausting march I felt but pleasantly tired.

That evening we camped in a beautiful flower-strewn marg by the Valley of Gadasar. Tall marguerites encircled our camp and a pleasant prospect of hills and dales lay in front of my tent. As night closed in, one by one my men withdrew to pay off their daily debt to nature. But on such an eventful day I could not think of paying off mine so soon. So I lay in my camp-chair lulled into a half-wakeful somnolence by the murmur of the mountain-stream hard by, and the fitful caress of the waving marguerites which rose tall and thick round my face and arms. Who that has inhaled the midnight air, with no barriers of brick walls and constraining roofs between him and the starry vault, has not felt the strange influence of all things at that magic hour? Or who again that has "slept out o' nights" has not been caught up into a companionship of greater things, into a fellowship with infinity itself? But more mysterious still, as the night

hours passed, was the sense of brotherhood with all Life. As that day seemed to have extended an open invitation to me to view all that was sublime and awe-inspiring in the handiwork of Nature, so that night seemed to have prepared for me a secret initiation into the vast plans and hidden purposes of Providence. Cobwebs of doubts and difficulties seemed for a time to be brushed aside by the besom of an Understanding bigger and greater than mine, and I realised as never I had in all my tour that, a mere shifting particle as I was in that vast, stupendous scheme of things, I was yet in some mysterious way immediately and vitally connected with all that was above me and around me, and that I was as much part and parcel of them all as they were of me!

The gaudy day was already afoot when I woke up next morning and found my men busy packing up things for another long march that awaited us that day. I had a hurried *chota-hazri*, and was soon on the move and before long found myself taking our inevitable matutinal mountain-climb. These mountain-climbs of three, four and five thousand feet taken day after day were growing a little fatiguing for our ponies and tedious for my men, and would have quite got on my nerves but for the thought that like all bad and good things they must before long come to an end.

It was past noon when I reached the top of Loolgool Nag and rested there awhile to have my cold luncheon. Huge boulders lay blocking

the way after that, and I had to do a good hour's hop-scotch before I reached the shore of the Nag, which broke up before long in several streams which in their turn became regular cascades and hurried down naturally formed terraces, till at the far end of them we came upon an extended marg and overlooked the Tresangam Nallah. Down this *nallah* we went hour after hour, now jumping from boulder to boulder, then trudging on stony tracks till at sunset time I reached our camping-ground ahead of my men. Being tired and hungry I sought out a *gujjar's* hut and asked for some milk. The kindly *gujjar* at once had one of his goats milked, and after boiling it gave it to me to drink, while with that peculiar considerateness that is such an ennobling feature of men habituated to wild, nomadic life, he took to massaging my tired limbs of his own accord, and without even waiting to ask my permission. The milk and massage quite set me up and I lay smoking at full length on the flat roof of his hut, quietly waiting for my men to make their appearance. It was quite dark when at length they reached the camping-ground and had scarcely set up my tent and rammed into the ground the last peg when the skies of a sudden seemed to be rent by thunder and lightning, and the storm that was brewing ahead of us all that afternoon burst in a heavy downpour and torrential rains fell for the next two hours.

Hurriedly piling up our things inside the tent we all sought shelter in the poor *gujjar's* hut and

stayed in one of its airless, lightless, smoky chambers for those two long weary hours. That was not the only bad part of the wrath of heavens against us, but worse followed when we made for our tent and noticed the shocking condition in which all things were left. A brawling stream ran almost touching my tent-pegs, and the tent itself with the ground it enclosed was soaking wet. The fire-wood being in the same condition, I had to go without any meal for that night. But what concerned me most was the plight of my men. Ever since leaving Gurais they had barely found time to cook their regular meals, so each night they had to rest content with the mere apology of a meal. This insufficiency of nourishment and sleep day after day, after the continuous strain and fatigue of long marches, had begun to tell on them, but it was the ill-timed downpour of rain that evening that finally broke their spirit. My stalwart *khitmadgar* who had disdained to breathe a word of complaint on the most vexatious of days, came and said in a plaintive, almost piteous tone, that he was so tired and so very hungry that he felt that " his life had gone out of him." I said I knew their difficulty, but saw no way out of it, and consoled them with the hope that the day following would see the end of their many days' hardships and long privations, as we were expected to reach our destination at the close of it. It was after all a poor consolation, and I felt that something must be done and done immediately to relieve their long-endured hunger.

The *gujjar* was summoned and given to understand that he must let us have as much milk as he could possibly give us, and he must also somehow or other procure food for our men. He readily consented to let us have every drop of milk he had, but as to food he regretted he was unable to do more than share his own few *chapatis* with my men. That, I said, would do splendidly, and our little difficulty for the night was thus tided over to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The following morning broke beautifully bright and everything around looked fresh and green for the thorough wash they had overnight. Its own bright mood Nature imparted to us all, and as that was the last day of our long-drawn tour, we were all in splendid spirits. For the time being everything went as expected. We did not much mind the inevitable daily climb of three thousand feet we had to take that day for the fifth time in unbroken succession. But soon the tedious descent commenced down the Erin Nallah. For a time the magnificent views we got of the beautiful *nallah* amply compensated for our exertions. But before long we grew tired even of them, so that we descended thousands of feet in very indifferent mood. Once down, the weary tramp commenced unrelieved by any interesting sight or arresting sound, and it was made all the more wearisome by the hot baking afternoon sun of the plains. It was while walking in this hot sun in the plains after spending weeks among the high mountains that the fatigue of days of

hardships and privations told on me, and I felt so excessively tired and dispirited that I feared I would for certain break down before reaching our destination that night.

I trudged nonetheless as best I could and at last at sunset-time we came to the spot where Tragbal road and Erin Nallah track joined the main Bandipur road. From the junction Bandipur is not quite four miles; still, in the condition in which I was, every furlong told on me and at times I felt as if Bandipur, like will-o'-the-wisp, receded further and further the nearer I approached it. At last at very nearly eight in the evening I reached the *dâk* bungalow, but as my men were left far behind, I knew I would have to go that evening again without my one square meal of the day. But it seems we were in luck's way, for the *naib-tehsildar* had a *doonga*-boat kept ready for me, and Hajija, the father of my three *khitmadgars* and the faithful *chowkidar* of my house-boat at Srinagar, had sent provisions to meet us at Bandipur. These, when we got on the *doonga*, came as a godsend, and I, after weeks, once again greedily devoured large slices of fresh bread, and when I had as much as my long-starved appetite needed, I sat down to go through my mail which lay in a pile on the *doonga*-table. I had hardly gone through half-a-dozen letters when I was overcome with sleep, and I do not know how long I must have slept, for when I woke up, I found the whole boat fast asleep and, except for the placid waters glistening under the

pale moonlight, not a thing stirred and an unearthly silence reigned over the whole face of nature.

The stars were still in the heavens when the following morning the *doonga*-men took the boat across the treacherous Wular. All that day and the next we leisurely went up the Jhelum. It was while thus going up in the *doonga* that we felt the effect of our last five days' continuous marches of nearly one hundred miles over rough stony tracks and high mountain-passes. So exhausted was I that I had not the will nor the energy to read or write, or even to dress or shave, and so passed the two days in pyjamas, lying stretched most of the time in the deck-chair. However, the magnificent mountain-scenery we came across in this side-trip to Tilail and Erin Nallah amply compensated us for all the extraordinary demands it made on our patience and energy. The sight of the mighty Nagna was a rich reward in itself: but when I consider that I had a peep into the Heart of the Himalayas and traversed the inmost wilds of Kashmir and that in those five days was concentrated all that was worth seeing in all the other Kashmerian valleys I had been to, not excluding oven the classic walk from Baltal to Amarnath Cave, I think it was the happiest idea of all my tour that led me to make this side excursion into the Tilail and Erin Nallah.

SRINAGAR ONCE AGAIN

"Life in Srinagar flows on very easily and pleasantly, if somewhat lazily: the days are usually taken up with eating and drinking, shopping and gossiping with one's friends, neighbours and the wily merchants who daily infest one's boat."—WAKEFIELD.

CHAPTER VIII

SRINAGAR ONCE AGAIN

THIS last tour towards Gilgit was the most prolific of all the tours I had taken, inasmuch as it yielded me fully two hundred and eighty miles with over thirty-four thousand feet of mountain-climbing. The result was that the total mileage fell short of the coveted thousand by little over a hundred miles, and in the matter of height it had already exceeded the proposed hundred thousand by nearly five thousand feet. It was now a matter of taking a small closing tour to complete my programme, and so I turned my eyes towards Islamabad and arranged for a leisurely circular tour of Kishtwar and the Wardwan Valley.

But before doing so I wanted to rest my men thoroughly and feed them, and as for myself I wanted to appease my own long-drawn-out hunger by feasting on the lovely fruits I saw in abundance around me, and to recreate my own fatigued muscles and imagination by indulging in those social amenities which old Srinagar could always be relied upon to provide in ample measure. With this intention, the moment I stepped off the *doonga*-boat on Pestonjee's Pattan,

I visited my various friends and in their company planned *shikara*-rides and afternoon excursions to the fruit-gardens on the Dhal. The memory of one such excursion to Shahi Bag is fresh in my mind. There were pears and peaches, plums and apples by the thousand in the garden, and one could have as many of them as one chose for the mere trouble of extending one's hand. But what I enjoyed most, were the long unending bushes of vine with grapes hanging in huge bunches in each one of them. The mere sight was a feast in itself, but my companions and I had a free run of them and furtively plucked a few bunches off those vines which were especially reserved for the Maharaja's table. On our way back from the Shahi Bag we had the *shikara* taken right through the famous floating fields of lotuses by the Nishat and the Kotar Mahal. It was the season of the lotus, and so these flowers were out in all their glory and perfection. I have been a close observer of the lotus all over the world, but even in Egypt, the land of the lotus, they never bloomed to such perfection as they did in Kashmir. In other parts of the world the flower is apt to look stiff and is deeply hued, but the lotus bloom of the Dhal looked the very emblem of delicacy and softness both in tint and feel. Indeed, so delicate was its pink and with such exquisite art was the white of the lower half of the petals made to blend with the pink of the upper, that one felt one would have to dip one's brush in the roseate hues of the dawn to paint

it, and unwind the musty rolls of ancient Buddhistic and Brahmanical sacred writings to understand its deep mysteriousness. Anyhow, looking at the bloom of the Dhal I could understand why, from time immemorial, the lotus has been looked upon as a sacred flower, and what Buddha meant when he delivered his mystic *mantra*—"*Hom mani pani hum!*" [1]

But I had not quite a week of these rounds of revelry and aimless gaiety, when I began to feel restless and sighed again for the exquisite thrills of the snow-bound passes and the deep silences of the lonely valleys. I therefore told my men to get things immediately ready for our last short completing tour in Kishtwar, and had even fixed the day of leaving, when one evening stepped into my boat Diana's husband and gave me the welcome news that they had just returned from Sonamarg and intended staying in Srinagar a fortnight. The opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of Diana was too tempting to be lightly missed. So that last sentence of her husband on the instant settled the programme of my movements for the next fortnight.

We met almost daily and had frequent teas and outings together up the river and away in the Imperial *baghs*. But, oh, what a difference it made in the whole prospect of the Nishat and the Shalimar when Diana trod their flower-scented paths or stood admiring the flowers under their age-worn chenars! The Nishat indeed looked

[1] "There is a beauty in the flower of lotus."

" the Garden of Gladness " as it is called, when fair Diana's beaming face lit up its shaded avenues or its spacious old terraces rang with the peal of her youthful laugh! And Shalimar for once after centuries lived up to its name and looked a veritable " Abode of Love," when this modern incarnation of Nur Jehan in her white muslin gown lay stretched on its lawn under a spreading chenar, idly sipping her cup of tea, or dreamily toying with her plate of cakes. Even the old Dhal never appeared so bright and lively as when its glassy surface reflected Diana's wonderful person, nor its huge pink lotuses, lovely as they were, ever looked so lovely as when they formed a circle round this personification of grace and beauty reclining in her *shikara.*

Indisputable and instantly appealing as were the charms of Diana under the full glare of the afternoon sun, they were as indescribable as irresistible when seen under the pale, uncertain light of the moon. The memory of one night in particular is still fresh within me—the night when we three had a moonlight picnic together on the Isle of Gold in the Dhal Lake. So perfect was the evening, and so lovely the scene around, that it was midnight before we could finally make up our minds to leave the beautiful isle and paddle our way home. But once we were in our *shikara,* it cut across the Dhal with its precious burden lying at full length in it. It was while we were thus moving along in a half-wakeful state that our boatmen of a sudden drew up their

chapas to rest a while, and in the intervening silence the strains of a familiar song came floating over the moonlit waters from a house-boat lying moored in the distance, and fell like an enchantment on our listening ears. It was then in the ecstasy of that moment that I *knew* what Moore meant when he sang of—

> " those sounds, full of feeling,
> That soft from the lute of some lover are stealing,—
> Some lover, who knows all the heart-touching power
> Of a lute and a sigh in this magical hour.
> Oh! best of delights as it ev'rywhere is
> To be near a lovely *One*,—what a rapture is his
> Who in moonlight and music thus sweetly may glide
> O'er the Lake of Cashmere with that *One* by his side!
> If woman can make the worst wilderness dear,
> Think, think what a Heav'n she must make of Cashmere! "

But even more than Moore, I was reminded of that romanticist of modern America, who was not ashamed to put into words what most right men think, but don't think it is right for them to say so. " I have concluded," remarks Jack London, " that the greatest thing in life, in all lives, to me and to all men, has been Woman, is Woman, and will be Woman. Greater than our toil and endeavour, the play of invention and fancy, battle and star-gazing and mystery —greatest of all has been Woman." Little Lalla with her simple witchery and happy *naïveté* had already taught me that lesson of Jack London's, but it was the splendid sorcery and blossomed womanhood of Fair Diana that gave a note of finality to that teaching of little Lalla's! Thus

came strangely to be fulfilled, though partially as is the case with all things of the earth, one of the two resolutions I had made when a boy, inasmuch as in Diana I have brought back with me the memory of "the fairest and rosiest of all fair-skinned, rosy-cheeked daughters of Eve in Cashmere."

KISHTWAR AND WARDWAN VALLEY

"In Kishtwar and down Wardwan way,
Each mountain in wintry grandeur towers,
And whitens with eternal sleet,
While Summer in a vale of flowers
Is sleeping rosy at its feet."

MARY PETRIE.

CHAPTER IX

KISHTWAR AND WARDWAN VALLEY

It was nearing the middle of September when I at length made up my mind to do the last lap, and complete my thousand miles. So one night after bidding good-bye to Diana and her husband, I had the *Constance* taken up the stream and moored at Sonawar Bagh to make it possible for us to leave early the following morning for Islamabad. We did leisurely small portions of the river each day, and on the evening of the third day reached Islamabad and the next morning were busy getting things ready to start on our projected tour of Kishtwar and the Wardwan Valley.

The first stage of the tour began well, and we reached Verinag after a rather tedious march of twenty-one miles over a hard, dry, dusty road and pitched our tents at the foot of the mighty Banihal overlooking the royal gardens. The gardens and the far-famed spring of Verinag, which is reputed to be the secret source of the Jhelum, were visited the same evening. As I stood in the repose of the evening by the octagonal tank enclosing the spring and looked into the limpid opalescence of its pure indigo-blue waters,

touched here by the golden autumnal tints of the trees around and flashing there with the silver of the shoal of the sacred carp which moved up and wheeled round in serried ranks in search of food, I understood the romantic charm of Verinag and the spell which held Jehangir and his fair Nur Jehan in the palace by this bright blue pool! The palace itself is in ruins now, but its grounds still contain a wonderful collection of apple-trees, brought from all parts of the world, and which were, when I saw them, heavily laden with fruits ripe and richly-tinted. These last were not so leisurely watched nor so disinterestedly admired as the sacred carp had been. For the moment I entered the palace-grounds the heavily-laden branches were pulled down one after another and quickly relieved of the pick of their burden, which was as quickly consumed by the set of hungry urchins that had followed in my wake and fought lustily and good-humouredly over each little apple I happened to toss among them.

The day following was set apart for going up the top of the Banihal Pass. At one of the turnings near the top the current of wind was so strong that I could not make any headway against it and so stood by helplessly for a moment. The guide, seeing me momentarily held back, said that we were lucky in going up the pass before the winter had set in, for once the winter held the pass in its icy grip, the wind became so boisterous and so very strong that any ill-

fated postal runner that happened to get caught in it was lifted bodily off the road and pitched into the ravine below. I had never heard of wind lifting a man off his feet and so took the information vouchsafed to me by my guide *cum grano salis*. But on my return to Srinagar, happening to speak of it rather sceptically to one of my friends who had passed his life in Kashmir, he to my great astonishment confirmed the guide's statement and said he personally knew of one such case in which a runner was blown off the edge of the road and brought down in a critical state to Verinag to die eventually there.

Except for the idea that by going up the Banihal Pass I had at last gone up the Pir Panjal,—which as far as their activities are concerned bounds the horizon of most visitors to Kashmir, and which while at Srinagar loomed so large on mine and was such an incitement to me to scale its snow-tipped peaks,—this ascent up the pass, compared to the thrilling climbs I have had in the Lolab and Ledar Valleys, was a miserably tame affair, devoid of excitement or even of interest. The morning following I left Verinag for Kookernag and found it so hemmed in, and by such insignificant hills, that I would have barely remembered to mention it here, were it not for a little incident that threw a side-light on the strange and inexplicable medley of ideas that go to form the mentality of Modern India and make it so puzzling to the stranger newly out from the practical West. On the way to the Nag

I happened to come across the bungalow reserved for the forest-ranger, and looking in I found a big, fine-limbed, healthy-looking lad of some sixteen summers, perfectly nude, who, seated on the floor, was vigorously rubbing his body with some oil he had by him in a vial. In the open room were his clothes, which included among other things a couple of linen collars and rich silk ties with a pair of brown lace boots of English pattern and make. I inquired of the lad who he was and where he had come from. He replied he was a *Sanyassi* and had come from Srinagar to recover his health. Noticing his fine build and healthy look, his reply made me open wide my eyes and stare at him in blank amazement. I asked surprised, "What has a *Sanyassi*, who had renounced the world, to do with ties and collars and English boots?" He replied there were different sects among the *Sanyassis* whose habits differed as widely as their ideals of life and conduct. That was true enough, I rejoined, yet however much the habits and ideals of life of the different sects of *Sanyassis* might vary, there was one point on which they must all agree if the term *Sanyassi* was to have any meaning or significance. And that was, as he well knew, that all *Sanyassis* must primarily renounce the world with all that it held dear in blood-ties and material possessions. Upon this he launched out in a string of sayings, commencing with Shankaracharya and Ramkrishna and ending with Mill and Herbert Spencer. to prove that all know-

ledge was relative and every conclusion a matter of opinion. I asked amazed how and where had he got hold of so much learning at such a tender age. To which he replied that his *guru* had taught him all that and much more which, if I cared to stay with him a little longer, he would be only too glad to impart to me. I thanked him profusely for his splendid offer, but said I must perforce forgo the pleasure as I was rather tired and hungry and was for the moment in need of more substantial fare than what his Spencer and Shankaracharya could possibly provide me with.

The following morning saw us again on our march to the foot of the Sinthan Pass through the pretty village of Dosoo, a couple of miles above which at a place called Soi Nar we came upon an ideal camping-ground at the junction of two mountain-torrents and decided to pitch our tents there for the night. Next day commenced our ascent of the Sinthan Pass. The top of the pass is supposed to be only three thousand feet high, but to me the ascent seemed so tediously long and unconscionably steep that I fancied when I reached the top I had ascended quite five thousand feet and more. But once I made the top, an extensive panorama opened out to my view, disclosing my old friends, Nun and Kun, towering above the rest of the heights. That night we stayed in the forest bungalow on the other side of the pass. And well it was that we were in a bungalow, for such torrents of rain came down soon after we were settled in it and in consequence

the thickly wooded grounds around it were in such a soaking condition as to make them anything but inviting for camping purposes.

The next morning, however, it turned out to be beautifully bright and sunny, and amid fine sylvan scenery we made our short march to Tsingam. As I had by then walked nearly sixty of the hundred miles needed, I gave up going further south into Kishtwar and turned away sharply eastwards to proceed to the Wardwan Valley by the shortest route. The forest-ranger at Sinthan had told me of a new forest road leading from Tsingam over the mountains direct into the valley of the Wardwan. But he said there were two objections to taking this route. I would get no supplies whatever on the way, not even milk, till I reached Wardwan Maru, and I would have to go on over a very steep and rather dangerous snow-pass on which I was apt to lose my track if it chanced to snow. The more usual and easier way, he went on to say, was by Kishtwar and Moghul Maidan, the only objection to it being its distance, which was nearly three times the shorter forest route.

As it was still early in the season to fear any heavy snow-fall, I resolved to chance the shorter way, and so we took in at Tsingam supplies of milk and eggs enough to last us for full two days and left the village at break of day for the adventurous journey across the snow-mantled mountains. For the first six miles it was a continuous ascent, but the road being good we

experienced no special difficulty and by noon we were walking on the long trail on the mountain-summit. Gradually the track led down till, fording a rather risky stream, we eventually came to our camping-ground in good time for tea. Satkul, for that was the name of the place, was a lonely spot with but a deserted *gujjar* hut, and being in the shape of a triangle with streams running on three sides, it looked not unlike the Trap of Lohinsa, though the enclosing hills rising not quite so high nor so precipitously as in the other case, it did not actually present an ominous aspect.

That night when I went to bed the sky was perfectly clear, the stars were out in all their mystic grandeur and everything promised well for our next day's risky ascent over the snow-pass. However, when I woke up the following morning and looked out of my tent, it was a white world that met my eyes, so completely were the hills enclosing us and the ground in front of the tent covered with snow. It, indeed, made a fine sight for the eyes, but it sent my heart racing on the instant, for it boded no good for our day's march. Nor could we stop over for the day, for fear of the pass getting snow-bound should there be a heavier fall of snow later on. I therefore passed order to break up camp. The pony-men being apprised of my intentions, came running to me and begged of me to postpone going for a day, as from their past experience they were positive that it would be dangerous, if not

impossible, for their ponies to cross the pass after the fall of snow such as we had over-night. "Very well," I said, "I shall put off going. But you must get me milk, eggs, and the rest of the supplies we shall be needing for the day following." "Where could we get them from, *huzoor*?" they inquired amazed. "How can we then stop here?" I questioned, in a tone of equal amazement, and cut the matter short by commencing instantly my march, followed by my tiffin-coolie.

The sun came out in all its brilliance shortly after we had commenced our march, and in its golden glow the dripping forest made a wonderful sight, with snow lining every branch and forming a fantastic snow-flower on every little radiating group of twigs. But this entrancing scene was of short duration, for before very long we left every vestige of vegetation behind and ascended up bare rocks, and it grew dark and snow began to fall. At first I refused to take any notice of it and went on ascending as I stood, in my khaki shirt and shorts, and didn't even care to put on my oil-silk. However, as we proceeded up, we found the track half-covered with freshly fallen snow, but it was when we neared the top that we noticed that the snow had completely blotted it out and there was not even the bare trace of a foot-print to guide us over that ascending mass of soft snow. For a while I stood and intently looked round on the off-chance of spying out some post or other sign left by a considerate forest-ranger to guide the way-lost venturing tramp like myself.

But look where I would, I could see nothing but ascending mounds of snow. It was no use standing there, especially as the wind was getting stronger every moment, and the snow falling faster and faster. So whatever of courage was left in me I took in both hands and just went ahead and reached the top. But so entirely and thickly was the top covered with snow that for some time I again hesitated not knowing which way to turn. To make matters worse a strong icy wind laden with drifting snow blew right into my face and eyes and almost blinded me for a while. So strong indeed was it that I felt as if I were caught in a regular blizzard. A passing fear took possession of my mind and unwonted tremors passed through my body as I strove to press forward in the blinding greyness. Yet, strange to say, in my heart of hearts I was actually thrilled to be made to undergo that strange experience. And it was not difficult for me to account for these opposite feelings taking possession of me at the same moment. For, like Byron's Manfred, I had panted from my youth upwards—

> " to breathe
> The difficult air of the iced mountain's top,
> Where the birds dare not build, nor insect's wing
> Flit o'er the herbless granite."

And here most unexpectedly I had not only been made " to breathe the difficult air of the iced mountain's top," but to pass through the thrilling experience of facing a passing blizzard.

But this experience, thrilling as it was, did not

help matters nor make the road for me! On the contrary, I felt as helpless as before, not knowing where or how to proceed. As before, I again launched forward, plunging down defiantly into the mounds of soft snow. Unused as I was to such extreme cold, and being by nature of a timid disposition, it required some resolution to go forward when I had not the faintest notion as to where I was going. Luckily, however, I was not made to endure this torture of uncertainty for very long, for I had not gone down a few hundred feet when I saw, or I fancied I saw, the edge of the track a little distance in front of me. Fancy or no fancy, I made straight for it. It was, however, lost as soon as I was on it, and I had again to go ahead trusting my instincts. But my instincts did not fail me this time, for away in the distance I could see unmistakable signs of the track, and once on it, it was all plain sailing, though trudging in soft snow was not exactly a pleasant operation. To add to our discomfort a thick fog overtook us and it grew so very dark that we could hardly see a few feet ahead of us, but as we were now firmly established on our track, we feared not the heavy snow-fall the sudden darkness boded. Our fears, however, proved groundless, for we had not been many minutes making our way through this bit of Erebus when the fog lifted as suddenly as it had descended on us, and after that it was all easy going. To complete our good fortune the sun came out as we neared the edge of the

mountain-summit and the mists that hung fitfully over the neighbouring mountain-tops rolled up sufficiently to lay open to our admiring gaze the whole of the Wardwan Valley, thousands of feet below us in all its extended magnificence of fields of rich and multi-coloured harvest, set off in vivid contrast by the dark stretches of wooded heights which surrounded them and the glistening waters of the Wardwan which flowed, unhasting unresting, beside them. From that soaring coign of vantage the road gradually descended in long and continuous zig-zags through a dense forest all the way down to the valley. Going down it mile after mile was rather a wearisome performance, and at each little break in the serried ranks of trees I looked down anxiously into the valley to see if I had at last come to the end of my tedious descent, when a momentary excitement was provided by a black object approaching in our direction from behind a little rise in the road. Before I could point it out to my tiffin-coolie who was immediately behind me, and ask him what it was, he shouted in a veritable frenzy, "*Baloo, baloo; bhago, Sahib, bhago!*"[1] And sure enough there were two bears, one of a good size and the other quite small,—evidently a mother and her young one. But there was no occasion to follow the excellent advice of the coolie, for before I had quite realised my situation, the little one and her mother quite obligingly turned round and toddled

[1] "A bear, a bear; run away, *Sahib*, run away!"

away in the neighbouring woods. My coolie stood stock-still and speechless behind me, and when he had recovered himself sufficiently to speak, he remarked that a black *baloo* was the worst creature to encounter in the forests of Kashmir. Later on in Srinagar when I met my friend Dr. Neve and spoke to him of the incident and repeated the coolie's remark, he from his long experience vouched for the correctness of this statement. On hearing this I casually remarked that it must have been the mother-instinct of the bear to see her young one safely removed from harm's way that led her to turn away from us. To my surprise Dr. Neve shook his head and said that it was exactly when the bear was with her young one that she became most dangerous to encounter. If that was so, I asked him how he accounted for her taking to her heels on seeing us, for surely we did not shout nor did anything to frighten her away. That was exactly what puzzled him too, he replied; her running away was most unaccountable and almost unbelievable. "But I suppose," he said, "there is no more accounting for a bear's eccentricities than for those of a man." As I carried no fire-arms with me, many people have asked me since what would I have done had the bear not proved as obliging as she did. I suppose I should have tried to keep her back as long as I could with the long spiked alpen-stock I had in my hand, and then there would have been a short sharp wrestling-bout, of the result of which they would have no

doubt heard from an eye-witness in the shape of my tiffin-coolie, who coolly told me that had the *baloo* come to attack the *Sahib*, he would have climbed up the nearest fir-tree and watched events and then waited for the rest of the party to come and release him from his precarious situation.

It was quite dark and nearly eight when I reached our camping-ground at Chinyar, where I anxiously waited for my men and ponies. When after a weary watching of an hour or more in cold and dark they at length made their appearance more dead than alive, the reader can well imagine what a task it must have been to set up the whole camp in that state of my men's condition and at that time of night. There was, however, one consolation, and that was that the day following was our long-looked-for rest-day after five continuous marches, and so it did not matter how late we went to bed or what little we had to eat. The sun was high up in the heavens when I got up the next morning and woke up the slumbering camp, and it was nearing noon when I lazily dressed and went out for a stroll on the sands by the river's bank. What with their glistening surface and lovely cream tint, the sands looked, in their own way, a picture of perfection, and long I basked and merrily did I loll in them, and came away leaving all kinds of messages on them for little Lalla and fair Diana.

The following two days we marched some twenty miles in the valley proper by a road skirting the tossing, foaming Wardwan, and

reached Inshin at mid-day. The camp was in a mild state of excitement that evening at Inshin, as it was the eve of the day that, if all went well, was to see the completion of the ambitious project we had set before us six months previously. But for the cool courage and steady nerves of my bearer and *khitmadgar*, that project, at all events in the case of its conceiver and leading figure, would have been left uncompleted almost within sight of its goal. The fact was that from Inshin we were turning right away from the valley and returning to our base over the Margam Pass, and to reach the foot of the pass we had to cross the great swirling Wardwan. Ordinarily it is a matter of merely going over a wooden bridge. But as the bridge had broken down, and there was no other within four miles of it, we were reluctant to take a round of eight miles to reach the bank opposite, which by fording the river we could do in as many yards. The river, however, raced past Inshin so swiftly and bounded over the obstructing boulders so furiously that to my untrained eye it looked pure madness to attempt to ford it even where it broke up in a loop and flowed less boisterously than at other places. When my men were told of my fears, they cast furtive glances at each other and, to demonstrate that the fording, though difficult, was not so dangerous as I feared, my *khitmadgar* jumped on the spare pony, which went right across gaily breasting the tossing, swirling waters. Once he reached the shallow waters, he turned the head of the pony and re-crossed the

stream with the same nonchalance with which he had crossed it. As I stood admiring his fine feat, he came up to me and said, now that the *Sahib* had seen him go across, he would not be afraid of doing it likewise. I said I was not so much afraid as I felt uncertain, not being a swimmer, of reaching the other bank, were I left to cross the river by myself. In that case, they quickly rejoined, they would be on either side of me to hold me up to their last breath in case of an emergency. At this splendid manifestation of their courage and devotion to me, I myself plucked up sufficient courage to jump on the spare pony. For some few yards it was all smooth going, but once we entered the brawling torrent I began to be uneasy, and before long felt as if my pony was lifted off its feet and was being fast hurried down the stream with its terror-stricken burden nervously clutching at its mane for dear life. So completely had this optical illusion taken hold of my mind that in great terror I shouted out to the *khitmadgar* and the bearer that I was falling off my seat. But they said they were by me and had a firm grip on my arms, which they would not relax even were " their soul to leave their body " in the attempt. By then I was feeling quite giddy and fancied that before very long I would tumble off the pony into the racing waters, but the noble assurance of my men falling on my ears at a critical moment broke the tension of the fears that were obsessing me and driving me into the

river. With one supreme effort I sat up on the pony, and after that did the rest of the crossing in perfect safety almost by myself.

That night was cold and frosty, and on the morning following—

"O'er marsh and stream one breathless trance of snow
With brooding fulness awed and hushed everything."

The valley looked, in consequence, a veritable fairyland with the hoar-frost lying thick and glistening on the turf around the camp and the trees up the hills. On such a beautiful wintry morn I walked up the Margam Pass and completed my Thousand Miles. But once I had tramped my thousandth mile, the zest and enthusiasm, which carried us forward on all our past tours and kept up our flagging spirits in moments of doubt and discouragement, seemed of a sudden to desert us, with the consequence that we found the rest of that march and the following two marches right down to Achebal tame, tiring and purposeless.

When early in the forenoon I reached the famous Moghul city, who should come to greet me with *dalis* of fruits and flowers but old Sadaat Khan, who, as every visitor to Kashmir knows, is as much a historical relic at Achebal as the Old Moghul Garden itself! But Time, alas, has worked sad havoc on the latter, which was in old Bernier's days "a very handsome garden, laid out in regular walks and full of fruit-trees with *jets d'eau* in various forms and fish-ponds innumer-

able, ending in a lofty cascade which in its fall takes the form and colour of a large sheet, thirty or forty paces in length, producing the finest effect imaginable!" As in the case of most of these royal gardens of Kashmir, the lowest terrace is cut away by the highway and Achebal Bagh is now much smaller and very much neglected. But smaller and neglected as it is, it still seems to possess the atmosphere of the days of the great Moghuls and to preserve the traditions of the old Eastern garden-craft in a manner that none of the other gardens do. Old histories and deathless love-stories seem still to haunt its shaded walks and crumbling walls! In its summer-house set in a tank just beneath the waterfall one imagines Jehangir and his lovely Nur Jehan reclining side by side for their noontide rest, lulled by the chaunt of the lofty cascade and cooled by the spray of a hundred *jets d'eau*! And there, in that gracefully curving cypress by the wind-tost rose-bush, the faithful Majnum seems to bend over his fair Laila and vainly claim her for his own. For Moghul garden-craft, like Moghul painting, was full of symbolism and rich with the sensuous charm and poetic dreaminess of the old Persian tales; and the story of Laila and Majnum, the faithful lovers who had but fleeting glimpses of each other twice on earth, was most frequently emblemised in the design of the double flower-beds in which two symbolic trees were planted to represent the eternal lovers. For instance, two low-growing fruit-trees, such

as a lemon and an orange tree, were planted in the midst of a parterre of flowers, and in such a situation the two trees stood for the final meeting of these star-crossed twin souls in heavenly kingdom to part no more. Or conversely, Majnum's sad, earthly destiny was symbolised by a weeping willow (*baide majnum*) whose drooping branches vainly strove to reach and enfold in their embrace a water-lily as slender and as lovely as fair Laila herself. However, the most frequent emblems of them are the cypress and the rose-bush—the cypress standing for the hopeful Majnum and the rose-bush on a little mound for Laila on her camel litter. There are other legends connected with the eternal pair, not so easy of discovery. For instance, dark purple violets disclose the gloss and perfume of Laila's raven tresses, white jasmine her round ivory-white throat, tulips and roses her lips and cheeks, the fringed narcissus her lovely long eyelashes, and the bud of a white chrysanthemum her budding white bosom.

But the old Moghul garden-craft, alas, is fast dying out! Most of our modern potentates know nothing of it, and the few who have some idea of it are so carried away by the meretricious charms of Western landscape-gardening that they take only a superficial interest in the old craft and give only a half-hearted encouragement to it. The old traditions, however, are better preserved in Kashmir than in any other part of India, and are capable of being revived in all their

pristine grandeur if only the Kashmir official would be quick about securing them and would not let the old Moghul garden-motto drop out of his mind, that "the garden is the truest index of a people's art and culture."

From Achebal we turned our steps to Bawan to see the famous ruins of Martund. "Bawan is," says Dr. Neve, "one of the most beautiful camping-grounds in Kashmir." And so it is, if one leaves the so-called camping-ground near the village alone, and goes a little way up the surrounding hills for his place of encampment. The spot I selected was in the compound of the *dâk* bungalow, overlooking the greater part of the Happy Valley and commanding a view of the entire range of the distant snow-clad Pir Panjal. Wonderful as was the panorama spread out before me at Bawan, the ruins of Martund, from what I had read and heard of them, held a superior attraction for me, and all the many months I was in Kashmir I was impatiently waiting for the day when my own eyes would lovingly rest on that lonely fane which Marion Doughty calls "one of the stateliest of the world's shrines."

On my way to Bawan from Achebal I passed within a few yards of Martund, but I would not branch off to have a look at it, because I knew from past experience that a ruin under the full glare of the sun was apt to lose whatever of pathetic beauty and solemn grandeur it might possess, and appear merely a melancholy collection of broken columns and half-fallen arches;

and that it was only in the repose of the evening or bathed in the pale, mystic light of the moon that it became vocal and spoke to one of the instability of all earthly things and beliefs, and of the vanity of human pomp and grandeur. So that night when the moon came up and the whole camp was fast asleep, I quietly stole out of my tent and went and watched the great ruin, and in the awful stillness of the midnight hour I tried to commune with "that lonely watcher on the mountain-side" and become *en rapport* with the spirit of the whole eerie scene around me. But try as I would, I could not get it to impart an impulse or breathe a word to me. The grey walls stood dumb and stupid—a mere blot on the fair scene around.

The reason why Martund failed to impress me that moonlight night, I thought, was possibly due to my inability to see in that uncertain light its "sculptured surfaces and delicately ornamented pediments and pointed arches," of which Marion Doughty speaks so eloquently. So finding the morning following grey and cloudy, I went to see it again, and saw it at close quarters with no better result nor any noticeable change in the estimate I had formed of it the night before. It was now evident to me why that famous fane failed to leave any particular impression on me. For in Martund there is little or nothing of what might truly be called architecture. True it is that Martund has a size that is imposing, and is built of stones that are big and massive. But

imposing size and big, massive stones do not make architecture. It is the pouring in of human spirit, in all its inspired intellectuality and passionate fervour, into the hard, soulless substance of wood or brick, stone or plaster, that makes architecture in the best and truest sense of the term. From pillar to pillar and niche to niche I went studiously in search of some manifestation of superior thought, some assured sign of elevated feeling, but try as I might and go where I would, I could not come across any in Martund. "Martund is the architectural lion of Kashmir," remarks Fergusson, "and all tourists think it necessary to go into raptures about its beauty and magnificence, comparing it to Palmyra or Thebes or other wonderful groups of ruins of the old world. . . . When, however, we come to reduce its dimensions to scale, and to examine its pretensions to rank among the great examples of architectural art, the rhapsodies of which it has been the theme seem *a little* out of place."[1] Not *a little*, but, I should say, a good deal out of place. Let me not be misunderstood. I am a great admirer of Oriental Art, and belong entirely to the school of Havel and Coomaraswamy in the matter of the ideals of Eastern sculpture and architecture and the standard by which they are to be judged, and think that Western critics had never had the requisite patience and breadth of vision to enter into Oriental temper and mode of feeling to understand and appreciate them.

[1] *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, p. 286.

For all that, to put up for our praise and admiration such a portentous piece of uninspired architecture as Martund is not only to lower Eastern architecture in particular but to betray gross ignorance of Oriental Art in general.

Quite disappointed, therefore, I moved away from Martund and Bawan itself the following morning, and in little over an hour reached Kanbal where my *Constance* was lying moored up. The same afternoon we left Kanbal for Srinagar. The trip down the Jhelum was done leisurely, letting the *Constance* practically glide down the river with the current. Doing thus about ten miles a day, we reached the City of the Sun on the fourth day for the fifth and last time.

LAST DAYS

" Ye who have traced the Vagrant to the scene
Which is his last; if in your memories dwell
A thought that once was his, if on you swell
A single recollection, not in vain
He wore his sandal shoon and scallop shell.
Farewell! "

BYRON.

CHAPTER X

LAST DAYS

THE moment I was back in Srinagar I began to make preparations for my return home. Six months had passed by, and the programme with which I had set out to Kashmir being now completed, there was no purpose or interest left for more prolonged stay. But it seemed the Fates had willed otherwise, for to all my inquiries at the several motor agencies in Srinagar the invariable reply made was that as the Durbar had passed orders to keep in reserve every available motor and conveyance till the *Lat-Sahib* of Bombay had departed, they could not promise me a car till the end of October. That meant staying in Kashmir for a full fortnight more than I had originally intended. My time, however, was fully taken up in visiting different public institutions and in paying farewell calls on my many friends and on my favourite resorts, which had by then so endeared themselves to me that I looked upon them almost in the light of personal friends.

Of the institutions visited, the first and foremost was the Mission Hospital in which my friend Dr. Neve and his brother worked. The good Doctor took me round the different wards,

and from the way the poor stricken-down creatures greeted my friend and talked to him I could see what a popular figure he was among them; and from the personal interest he took in them and the deep concern he systematically and all too unconsciously manifested for their recovery and progress, I could not help noticing how well the old Doctor served the great cause he had consecrated his life to. Missionaries as a class, owing to the over-enthusiastic proselytising zeal of some among them, have never yet been in the good books of Indians, educated or otherwise, with the consequence that even the manifestation of their energy and zeal in the right and unexceptionable directions is looked upon with suspicion and distrust as serving only to catch the unwary in the toil of their religious creed and prepossessions. The Kashmir Mission Hospital indisputably belonged to the superior type of missionary endeavour and was a fine monument in itself of what a power for good and the uplifting of mankind Christianity could be, when the teaching and example of its great Founder fell into the hands of the right people who worked with a singleness of purpose for the pure love of men and the greater glory of Him who created them!

But more striking still, and one that appealed to me more strongly than even the Mission Hospital itself, as the very home and factory for the making and propagation of Christian thought and ideals, was the institution I visited

next. It was a missionary school established and conducted by one who, having been imbued from his youth with the highest Christian ideals, burned to realise them as well and as fully as he could in the youth he found around him in his own limited sphere of life. Thirty years ago this Christian idealist happened to find himself in Srinagar, and was so taken aback by the state of things as it then prevailed in the city, and felt so ashamed of the type of manhood that jostled him in the streets that he there and then vowed that he would spend his life and substance in mending that intolerable state of affairs and in regenerating the manhood of Kashmir. He knew that to try to put matters right simply by external agency would be to bring back the old state of things as soon as this external pressure was either removed or relaxed. The only sure way of doing permanent good to a suffering people was to make the people themselves the regenerators of their own decayed manhood and the menders of their own misfortunes, natural or otherwise. With this idea our young Christian enthusiast thought of helping the people by teaching them to help themselves. He knew, of course, that he could not hope to do much with the grown-up. They were a hopeless and an irreclaimable lot, and any time and effort spent on them, as had been done by so many of his brother missionaries too readily and not quite thoughtfully, would be so much time and effort wasted. But with their

children it would be otherwise. They were plastic and impressionable, and if caught early enough and persevered with, could certainly be moulded and made to respond to better influences.

With this noble object, young Cecil Tyndale-Biscoe set about regenerating the youth of Kashmir by establishing a school in the heart of the city itself, and there propounded and propagated the Christian mode of life and thought in adaptation to Kashmerian needs and surroundings. But Biscoe was aware that merely pumping into the minds of the young sound principles of Christian conduct and great ideals of Christian life, without at the same time giving them opportunities to put these principles and ideals into practice in their day-to-day life, would only end in turning the youths into mere enthusiastic bores and insufferable little prigs. So the first thing he made the boys do was to go out into the streets and work out, amid the immediate limitations, discouragements, and disappointments of actual life, the great things they were taught in the school. To cut a long story short, the grand result of this noble idea and Christian endeavour, carried over a period of thirty long years in face of strong opposition and caste prejudices, is—the Biscoe Boy, who is now the pride of Srinagar and the hope of Kashmir. Many a noble tale of his chivalry and manhood are told in the streets of Srinagar, and even in the far-off valleys if ever I came across a Kashmiri upright in bearing and conduct

he invariably turned out to be an old Biscoe Boy.

From this notable experience of mine of true Christian endeavour and purpose, I have to turn to another, alas, of an opposite kind, in which, as Fates would have it, the promoters and propounders of Christianity were likewise involved. It came about in this wise. During the last few days of my stay in Srinagar I happened to dine twice at the Rectory, and on both those occasions I met Christian clergymen who, though belonging to opposite creeds and persuasions, were yet, curiously enough, singularly alike in the one sure lesson they taught me that often the spirit of Christ was possessed least by those who knew to perfection his words and doctrines. In the first instance, it was the Roman Catholic Chaplain of Srinagar, a Jesuit by choice and a scholar by reputation. I had not been dining with him half an hour when I made out how fully he maintained the great reputation he had acquired for varied knowledge and scholarly attainments. The vast stores of his knowledge were really amazing and almost uncanny! No question on religion or philosophy, science or history could arise at the table but the erudite Father was ready with his answer. The conversation happened eventually to turn on the influence and status of the clergy in modern society. When my host and my learned friend had narrated their own experience in the matter, I spoke of the sad plight of my own Parsi priests

in this direction and of the little influence and respect they commanded in our community, and incidentally remarked that until a few years ago it was quite a common sight in Bombay to see a Parsi priest perched up on the coach-box of a carriage next to the coachman. This last remark of mine so upset the reverend Father that he flared up on the instant and said in an indignant tone that the Parsis should be ashamed of treating their priests as they did, and I by speaking of it at the table was making an insulting insinuation against the clergy in general and our host and himself in particular. I retorted I was doing nothing of the kind, but merely narrating certain deplorable facts as they prevailed among the clergy of a certain community, which cast no reflection whatever on the clergy as a class and which anyone any day might verify for himself even now by visiting the Parsi quarters in Bombay.

This most unexpected and uncalled-for outburst of ill-temper on the reverend gentleman's part took my host as much by surprise as it did me. He, however, tried to pour oil on the troubled waters by saying that the reverend Father evidently desired a change in the not enviable state of the Parsi clergy, and asked me if the laity did nothing to mend this unhappy state of affairs which reflected no credit on such an enlightened community as the Parsis. I replied that the main cause of the trouble was the indolence and ignorance of the priests them-

selves. To remedy it we had established special schools where our Scriptures were taught and expounded, and research-work was encouraged among the clergy by giving them scholarships or by having their works published from a fund which the community had specially set apart for the purpose. Later on my reverend host expressed his regret and surprise at the incident and said he for one could not understand how Father —— should have so misunderstood my remark as actually to create a scene at the dinner-table. Nor could I, I replied, except on the supposition that the reverend gentleman was not yet aware of the principal exhortation which Christianity makes to those whom she summons to her service, namely—to put the most kindly and favourable interpretation on the words and actions of men, especially of those with whom we do not happen to agree. Far from putting a kindly and favourable construction on my words as he was bound to do as an anointed minister of Christ, I continued, he, in his great haste to chastise me for speaking about the misfortunes of a particular set of priests, thought nothing of deliberately misrepresenting the whole intent and purpose of my remark and the spirit in which I made it.

As ill-luck would have it, the second incident also happened a week after in the Rectory itself, though fortunately there was nothing of a personal element in it and it went only to indicate how at times those who have of deliberate choice

and purpose vowed and are most genuinely anxious to bear witness in their own lives to the example and teaching of Christ, are debarred from doing so, owing either to their natural inability to mould their character to meet the special requirements of their great exemplar, or to some inherent defect in their temperament and understanding which makes it impossible for them to assume the Christian attitude of mind. In this instance it was the Chaplain of Gulmarg, who had just then returned from that fashionable resort as the season had ended, and to meet whom my reverend friend had asked me to dine with him. On being introduced I found him to be a young man, standing nearly six feet and looking a picture of health and strength. After a few of the usual preliminary platitudes he took up the conversation and straightway led us into his family history in all its details—how he was descended from a naval family and what fine men his fighting ancestors were, and then by way of change took us to Gulmarg and bemoaned that the English people there did not come to his services as regularly nor care for his company as much as a chaplain had a right to expect from his flock, and ended with saying that he believed that it was all due to his being rather young and an impatient spirit. My host and I sat like two dumb-driven lambs, occasionally exchanging good-humoured glances and unwillingly exhibiting all the time to " the Impatient Spirit " seated beside us how

Christian patience and forbearance was worked out in actual life.

These social amenities took up but a small part of my time, and my last days in Kashmir were mostly employed in getting more closely acquainted with its industries, artistic and otherwise. One morning, accompanied by an old resident of Srinagar, I went to the State Silk Factory, and one of the departmental heads took us right through the process of manufacturing silk-yarn. However, what interested me most was his narration of the life-history of the silk-worm—how they picked out the best silk-worms and by what ingenious process they mated them. He then took us through a regular maternity-ward and tried to give us some idea of the care and attention bestowed on each individual mother and on the products of her body. Incidentally he remarked that the silk-worms were liable to many of the ills of life to which we men were prone, and then led us to a kind of hospital with a nursing-home attached, where those suffering from consumption, fever and chronic indigestion were immediately segregated, carefully treated, and patiently nursed back to health and strength.

Side by side with this splendid manifestation of the power of Man to aid the lower creation in the proper fulfilment of the purposes of its existence, there was a deplorable evidence of his callousness towards his own fellow-creatures and of his unconsciously helping to create among

them the very diseases he was so nobly combating against in the lower creations. One of the maladies that is taking an increasing toll each year of the manhood of Srinagar is phthisis; and nowhere in Kashmir, I was told, the fell disease had found a better soil for the propagation of its nefarious intentions than in the hot, vicious atmosphere of the State Silk Factory. Even a dreamland could not long remain free from the desecrating touch of modern Industrialism, and it seems that this Moloch must eventually bind in its iron service a part of the manhood of the Happy Valley, as it has already done of the rest of the world.

Let us for a few moments turn from this ungainly side of Kashmiri life and work to its more agreeable avocations. The artistic industries, though still carrying a fairly thriving trade among the annual visitors of Kashmir, have, alas, long been in a sad state of decadence. The Cashmere Shawl, which made Kashmir known all over the world, is almost a lost art, and so is its famous papier-mâché. Wood-carving and embroidery-work still exhibit some traces of the old art and skill, and there are one or two dealers who do exceptionally good, honest, artistic work in them. Still, the touch of the old deft hand is gone and the art-industries of Kashmir are as a whole a thing of the past. For this unhappy state of things the modern tourist with his craze for cheap, shoddy art-wares might partly be blamed, but the principal

cause of the artistic decadence, I believe, is the deterioration in the character and ideals of the Kashmiri artist. Perhaps an example will best illustrate the point in question. I bought of one of the leading dealers an exquisite piece of old papier-mâché, in the shape of a small sliding pen-box, in which well-drawn and delicately-tinted birds and flowers were very effectively combined and set off on a ground of rich mellowed gold. I liked so much the design of the little piece and thought so much of the art displayed in it that I told the art-dealer that I would like to leave an order with him for another such piece if he guaranteed identical colouring and crafts-manship. As is their wont, he was profuse in his acknowledgments, but with many *salaams* regretted that the *huzoor's* noble intentions could not be carried out, were he to give him an order for a dozen boxes and offer him ten times the price he had paid him. On being asked the reason, he explained that the *karigars* (art-workers) who did the kind of work I liked were an extinct race of men. Those men, he continued, had *mohobut* (a love) for their work and lived for it. They did not do their work as modern papier-mâché men did—by the hour or for a wage; but when the fancy seized them they repaired to one of the Imperial gardens with a cushion, a carpet and a hookah. And there in the gardens, selecting a quiet, shady nook, they spread their carpet, leaned on their cushion, and as they dreamily drew long puffs of scented

smoke from their hookah they leisurely painted away and as long as they felt inclined, and the moment they found their inspiration failing them, they bundled up their carpet and cushion and came away.

All real art-work in all ages all over the world was done, indeed, in this manner and in this spirit. But it is idle to bemoan the past or sigh for a state of things which the modern World Economy will not tolerate, much less encourage. The whole end of modern civilisation seems to be economic. All progress seems to aim at facilitating and augmenting the production of goods. That in this process the long-inherited art-instincts of a race are apt to die out and the individual himself is bound in the long run to be worn out—is a thing the World Economy does not consider.

But I was not then considering the end or trend of modern civilisation nor bemoaning the short-sightedness of modern World Economy! My time was better employed in visiting my favourite spots on the Jhelum and the Dhal and in watching the changes that were fast spreading over the face of Nature. I paid a parting visit to each of my favourite gardens, and thought that for the last time I would saunter musingly along their unending flower-beds and lie long and lovingly on their shaded lawns; but go to what garden I would and lie on what lawn I liked, nothing seemed to make any direct appeal to me nor anything hold my thoughts

for two seconds together. On the contrary, everything around me—be they trees or flowers, shaded lanes or grassy lawns—made me sad and longing, for

"Over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of Something lost."

What that "Something lost" was, it did not take me long to discover. Last time when I visited these favourite haunts there was Someone beside me whose presence seemed to complete the picture and breathe fresh life into the old gardens. But this magical creature being no longer by me, the picture which she completed seemed without her presence to go all to pieces, and the fresh life which she had breathed into the gardens seemed to have once more departed with her departure — an impression which the advanced season and the whirling red leaf coming down made all too evident and emblematic.

But where the gardens failed, Nature stood staunch by me. For while the Nishat and the Shalimar meanly deserted me when most I needed them, and refused me the few hours of quiet enjoyment and simple companionship I sought of them, great-hearted Nature, unsought and unapproached, turned all Kashmir into one resplendent picture of light and colour and filled my closing days in that wonderful land with real joy and gratitude. As each day departed the autumn tints assumed a warmer and richer tone, the sun seemed to shine more brilliantly

than ever and the sky to become bluer and bluer, and in the air itself there was just that nip which makes one feel when walking as if one were treading the air. Mulberries were the first to don their autumnal robe of yellow, then came the poplars in their livery of green and gold, and last of all the chenar in his regal vestments of gold and red and purple. This hoary old monarch of Kashmiri forests, like some grave old gentleman, at first held stolidly aloof from this seasonal chromatic debauch of the gay young sparks of the woods, and pertinaciously kept to his old imperial robes of green, though through continuous wear they were already looking a bit old and shabby. But the spirit of colour and gaiety was abroad, which before long caught in its far-flung net the obstinate old dotard. And once caught, he offered no resistance but right merrily came out and joined the rest of the arboreal revellers, and towards the end of the festal season outrivalled them all in the beauty and brilliance of his gala dress, which was neither wholly gold, nor red, nor purple, but a subtle mixture of them all, which if an artist wished to paint he would have to take his pigments straight from the evening skies set aflame by the fiery glow of the setting sun.

Amid such scenes of indescribable beauty and splendour my Last Days in Kashmir were passed, till the morning of my day of departure broke. The sun rose and bathed in its roseate tints the whole range of the Pir Panjal, over which

the snow had fallen over-night. And as I lay in my bed wistfully contemplating this fast fading scene of unearthly splendour, I was rudely roused from my reverie by the persistent blowing of a motor-horn. The next moment Raheema came in and *salaaming* low said that the *huzoor's* motor-*gharry* was waiting up the Bund to take him down to Pindi. Reluctantly I got up and dressed and pushed in the last few things that were still left unpacked in the over-filled bags, and after having a cup of coffee and toast, I came out of the faithful old *Constance* and bade farewell to my equally faithful servants and then stepped into the waiting car, and before the day had ended I had left behind the land,—which had been to me a source of so much rich experience, so many grand associations, and so very full of bright and happy memories,—that land of fabled beauty and eternal romance—the Land of Lalla Rookh.

INDEX

A

ACHEBAL, 212, 213
Akbar, 16
Alsu, 37
Amarnath Cave, 116, 117
Amira Kadal, 13, 14
Anglo-Indians, the exclusive ways of the, 67, 68
Apharwat, 64, 66
Astor, 167

B

BACHELORS' Quarter, 151, 153
Baltal, 104, 105, 106
Bandipur, 157, 184
Banihal Pass, 198, 199
Bantry Bay, 4
Baramulla, 7, 61, 143
Bawan, 215
Bernier's, François, *Travels in the Moghul Empire*, 7, 20, 77, 159
Bhonar Ravine, 157
Bibiani-Sahib, 151
Biscoe School, 223, 224, 225
Blanc, Mont, 161
Bosian, 61, 62
Bruce's, the Hon. Mrs., *Kashmir*, 20
Budapest, 4
Buddhist Ruins of Wangat, 134, 135
Bund, the, 15
Bungus, 51, 55, 57
Bunyari, 31
Burza Kut, 25, 26, 27, 28
Burzil Pass, 169
Byron, iv, 220

C

CARP, the sacred, 198
Chagas, 67
Chandigam, 48
Changmar Range, 43
Chaplain of Gulmarg, 227, 228
Charing Cross, 150
Chatarhom, 26
Chenar Bagh, 151
Chenari, 6
Chergand, 23
Chief Judge of Kashmir State, 15
Chillum Chowki, 168
Chinyar, 209
Chittagul, 142
Chota Memsahib, 103
Constance, D.H.B., 12, 22, 25, 76, 79, 142, 143, 197, 218, 235
Conway, Sir Martin, 178
Coomaraswamy, Dr., 217
Crawling Order, 24

D

DACHIGAM, 23
Dhal Darwaza, 16
,, Lake, 15, 22
Dhanjibhoy's Shop, 78
Diana, 124, 125, 191, 192, 193
Domel, 5
Don Juan, a living, breathing, 149, 150
Doras, 46
Dosoo, 201
Doughty's, Marion, *Afoot through the Kashmir Valleys*, 20, 87, 88, 89, 148, 158, 178, 215
Dras, 105
Drogmulla, 49, 51
Duke's, Dr., *Guide to Kashmir*, 29, 34, 170, 173
Dulai, 5
Dunn, 82

E

EASTERN mind, the defects of the present-day, 13
Economy, the modern world, 232
Erin Nallah, 183

European Quarter, 15, 75
Everest, Mount, 178

F

Fergusson's *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 217
Ferozepore Nallah, 65, 67

G

Gadasar, 179
Gagangair, 93
Gandarbal, 83, 132, 142
Gangabal, the sacred lake of, 139–140
Garden-craft, the old Eastern, 213, 214, 215
Garhi, 5
Ghandi, Mahatma, 4
Goond, 93
Gulmarg, 63–68
Gurais Valley, 160
Gurikot, 166

H

Hajija, 184
Haramouk, Mount, 73, 140, 141
Hari Prabat, 19
Havel, 217
Hingal, 64

I

Idolatry, the fearful potency of, 117
Industrialism, the Moloch of modern, 230
Islamabad, 23

J

Jehangir, 198, 213
Jhelum, the, 5, 6, 23
Jones, Tom, 149, 150
Jungfrau, 161

K

K.2, the renowned, 178
Kahoota Station Hill, 46
Kajinag Range, 51, 54, 56
Kamri Pass, 160
Kangan, 89, 132
Karapur, 22
Kashmir, abiding charms of, 118; and the moral code, 150–153; Forest Department, 47; in Autumn, described, 233, 234; why an ideal holiday-maker's country, 68, 69
Kashmiri, artistic industries, 230–232; Rifles, 162; women, their beauty, described, 20
Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, 27
Killanmarg, 66
Kinchinjunga, 178
Kitardaji, 58
Kohala, 5
Kolahoi Glacier, 124
Kookernag, 199
Kumbrial, 48, 49

L

Ladhak, 106
Laila and Majnum, 213, 214
Lalla, vii, ix, x, 85, 86, 87, 128, 143, 193
Lalla Rookh, 83; garden of, 30
Lal Langar, Rai Saheb Man Mohan, 78, 79
Lamir, 67
Lidarwat, 123, 124
Lohinsa, the Hole of, 175, 176
Lolab Valley, 21–32
London, Jack, 193
Loolgool Nag, 180
Lothario, 150

M

Mahadev, Mount, 18
Majnum, 213, 214
Manasbal, 30, 84, 85
Manfred, Byron's, 205
Marco Polo, 20
Margam Pass, 210
Martund, the famous ruins of, 215-218
Matayan, 108
Matterhorn, 161
Mill, J. S., 200
Mission Hospital, Kashmir, 221, 222
Mitchell, 140
Mitsahoi, 108, 109
Moghul Maidan, 202
Moore, Tom, 2, 3, 19, 77, 159, 193; his *Lalla Rookh*, 83

INDEX

Moravian missionary, 107
Motamid Durbar, 78, 79
Murree Hills, 5
Mustagh, the mighty, 178

N

Nadir Khan, the *daroga* of Sonamarg, 110
Nagmarg, 39
Nagna Prabat, 177, 178
Nalanda, 135
Nali Mar, 16, 29
Naples, 4
Nasim Bagh, 16, 25
Neve's, Dr. Arthur, *Guide to Kashmir*, 29, 94, 215
Neve, Dr. E. F., 104, 141, 208, 221; his *Beyond the Pir Panjab*, 100, 104
Ningal, 65
Nishat Bagh, 18, 192
Noah's Ark, 11
North Cape, 4
Nun and Kun, 178, 201
Nur Jehan, 7, 198, 213; the modern incarnation of, 192

P

Pachwari, 170
Pahlgam, 122, 123
Panji Tarni, 117, 118
Pestonjee's Shop, 8; Pattan, 11, 189
Petrie, Mary, 196
Pilgrim's Progress, Bunyan's, 146
Pir Panjal, 19, 24, 63
Pohru River, 49, 53

R

Raheema, my *khitmadgar*, 22, 26, 35, 61, 65, 167, 235
Rajdiangan Pass, 157
Rajident-Memsahib, 45
Rajputana, 4
Ramkrishna, 200
Rampur, 7; the village of, 44, 45, 46
Ratu, 166
Rawal Pindi, 4, 151
Rectory, Srinagar, 225, 227
Riyar, 67
Roman Catholic Chaplain of Srinagar, 225, 226, 227
Rupal Nallah, 166

S

Saadat Khan of Achebal, 212, 213
Sancho Panza, 51
Sandow, 42
Sangam, 114
Sanyassi, 200
Satkul, 203
Sekwas, 126
Seven Bridges, 12
Shadipur, 30
Shahi Bhag, 190
Shalimar Bagh, 17, 192
Shankaracharya, 200, 201
Shankargarh, 165, 166
Shelim, Imperial, 17, 77
Shelley, 94
Shisha Nag, 120, 121
Silk Factory, State, 229, 230
Sinthan Pass, 201
Slough of Despond, Bunyan's, 146
Sobhana, 129
Sogam, 48
Somli Ali, 65
Sonamarg, 94, 95, 96
Sonawar Bagh, 76, 197
Soorphrar Pass, 126, 127
Spencer, Herbert, 200
Stories from Boccaccio, 150
Stuart's, Mrs. Villiers, *Gardens of the Great Mughals*, 31, 85
Swinburne's, Major, *A Holiday in the Happy Valley*, 60, 72, 136

T

Tacht-i-Suleman, 15
Talri River, 58
Taxilla, 135
Telbal, 25
Thajwas, 94
Thicket of Irresolution, 146
Tilail Valley, 172, 173
Tragbal, 157
Tregam, 49
Tresangam Nallah, 181

Tsingam, 202
Tulips, Kashmiri, 16
Tuscany, 133

U

URI, 6

V

VALLEY of Glaciers, Sonamarg, 94, 95
Varnow, the Valley of, 43
Venice, 16
Verinag, 197
Vigne, 16

W

WADHR, 55
Wakefield, 188
Wangat Valley, 133, 134
Wardwan Maru, 202
Whitman, Walt, iii
Woman, the greatest thing in life, 193
Wular Lake, 29, 31

Y

YAMHEUR Pass, 125
Yarkand, 106
Younghusband, Sir Francis, 10, 31, 85; his *Kashmir*, 31

Z

ZAIRAT of Baba Gulamuddin, 22, 25
Zamir, 64
Zoji Pass, the snow-bound, 106, 107, 108

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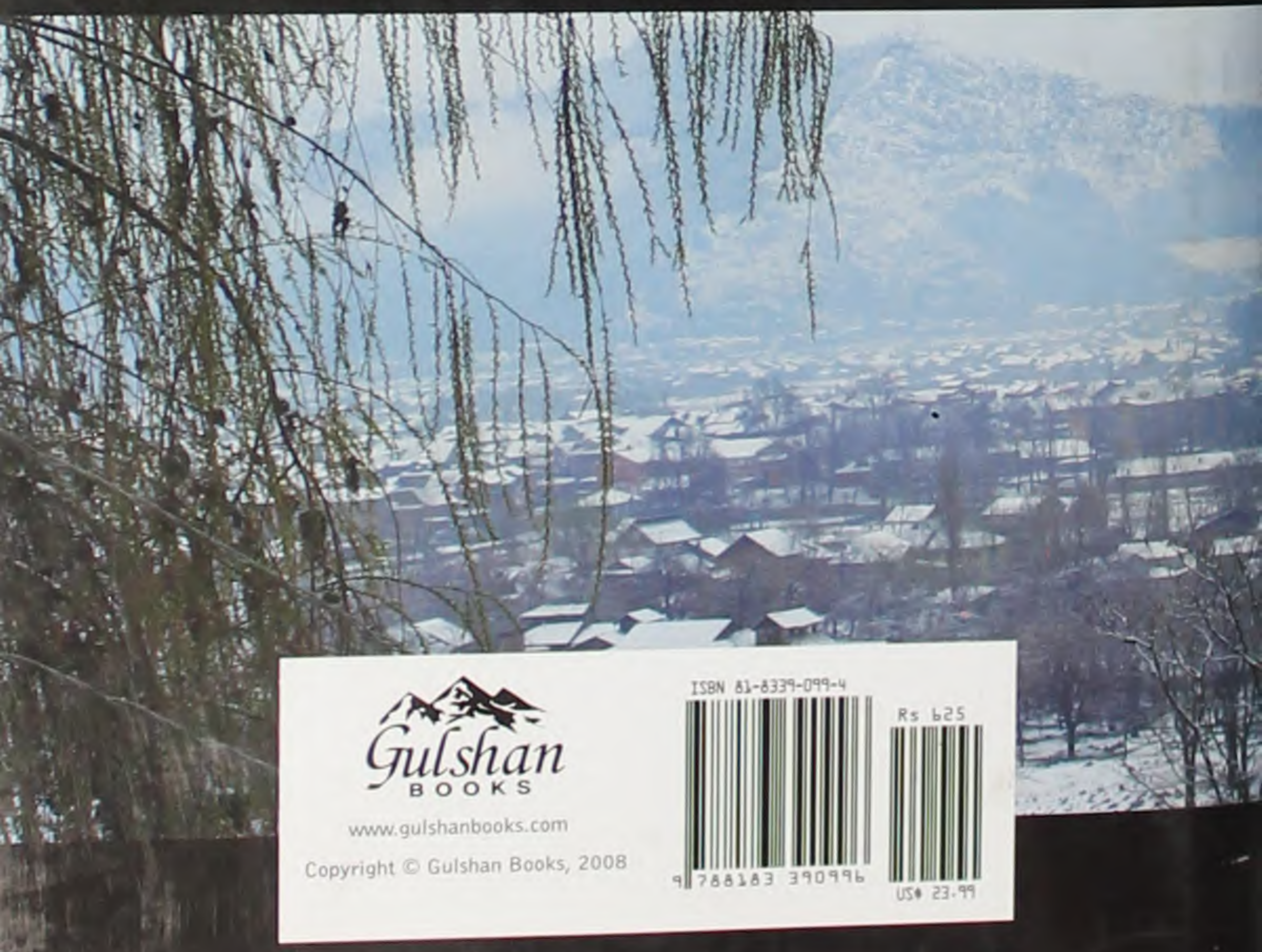

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